

Chapter 4 The Research Methodology

“The excitement of exploring new territory”.

Thomas Kuhn

4.1 Introduction

Research involves systematic and organised processes of inquiry, investigation, examination and experimentation. For research to be meaningful, Sudman and Blair (1998:6) assert it must be purposeful, have clearly defined objectives and planned procedures, be objective and demonstrate sound analysis, reporting, conclusions and recommendations.

Research methodology plays an important role in this regard as it entails the theoretical analysis and assessment of the research methods appropriate to a field of study. A sound research methodology is bound to contribute to the development and implementation of a meaningful research process to deliver valuable conclusions and recommendations. This Chapter will commence with a theoretical analysis of and motivation for the working research methods to be applied in the primary research phase of this study. Cooper and Schindler (1998:15) in accordance with Sudman and Blair, conclude that good research follows the standards of scientific method. This implies that:

- The purpose of research is clearly defined.
- The research procedures are clearly detailed.
- The research design is thoroughly planned.
- High ethical standards are applied in planning, conducting and analysing research.
- Limitations of the research are frankly revealed.
- Research findings are presented unambiguously.
- Conclusions are justified.

- The researcher's experience is reflected.

The chapters to follow will endeavour to achieve the standards of scientific method with the primary aim to address the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of planned brand contact as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals.

In order to conduct a systematic, organised and scientific research enquiry a sound research framework must be developed. The framework of a research study is according to McDaniel and Gates (1996:37), Sudman and Blair (1998:8-9), Burns and Bush (1998:58-69), Cooper and Schindler (1998:57) and Aaker, Kumar and Day (1998:41-60) defined by the steps encountered in the process of research. The research process provides as Aaker et al. (1998:41) stress, a systematic and planned approach to the research project and ensures that all aspects of the research process are consistent with each other, in particular with the research purpose and objectives. For reference a diagrammatic summary of the research process as developed by Cooper and Schindler (1998:57) is attached as Appendix A.

To ensure a logical flow and clarity in direction, Chapters Four and Five are structured according to the primary steps involved in research. Burns and Bush (1998:58-59) do however indicate that although theoretical frameworks of the research process suggest an orderly, step-by-step process, any given research process in practice becomes more interactive as the researcher engages with the process to set and order steps appropriate to the research project at hand. Given the approaches of various authors and the nature and purpose of this study, the following research steps will be applied to produce a research process and methodology that is clear, concise and appropriate:

- Defining the research problem and purpose
- Defining the research objectives
- Developing the research design
- Determining the research method: The selection of data sources

- The design of data collection procedures
- Selecting the sampling procedure

Chapter 4 will present a discussion of the research process to be pursued in this study. Chapter 5 will commence with a discussion of the practical execution of the research study and will predominantly focus on the analysis of data and the research results of the study.

4.2 Defining the Research Problem

In Cooper and Schindler (1998:56), Burns and Bush (1998:62) and Aaker et al. (1998:42), view of the research process, the research question or problem and its origin, selection, statement, exploration, and refinement, is unquestionably the most critical step in research design. The formulation of the research problem or question is essential in the research enterprise, as a poorly defined problem will misdirect the entire process.

Cooper and Schindler (1998:29–34) furthermore argue that perspective or research reasoning, is a key variable in effectively defining the research problem and in developing an appropriate research design. The term 'research reasoning' specifies that meaning is conveyed through argument. The researcher is expected to explain, interpret, defend, challenge and explore meaning. Cooper and Schindler elaborate that two types of argument are of great importance to the process of research reasoning. These are induction and deduction.

Induction involves the drawing of a conclusion from one or more particular facts or pieces of evidence. The conclusion thus explains the facts, whilst the facts support the conclusion. Induction occurs as a fact is observed and the question, 'why is this?' is posed. A tentative explanation is advanced in answer to this question. The tentative explanation is considered plausible given the available information and is defined as the hypothesis. McDaniel

and Gates (1996:41) elaborate that a hypothesis is thus a “conjectural statement about a relationship between two or more variables that can be tested with empirical data”.

Deduction on the other hand, is a form of inference purporting to be conclusive. The conclusion necessarily follows from the premises (reasons) given. These premises imply the conclusion and represent a proof. For a deduction to ultimately be viewed or accepted as correct, it must be both true and valid. The premises (reasons) given for the conclusion must agree with the real world. Research reasoning or argument thus moves to a more specific level to determine whether a hypothesis is plausible.

The literature study presented in Chapters Two and Three is focused on a key observation namely the introduction and growth of alternative (unexpected and unconventional) points of planned brand contact through traditional and new forms of media. The literature study and resulting inductive reasoning around the question - why is this, culminates in the following **suggestion or proposition**, namely that:

The unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

The above stated proposition as derived from an extensive investigation of current literature, is central to the primary research study and also presents the research problem of this study. The reasoning being that the process of induction pursued thus far, however intensive the study of literature, can not be considered complete without engaging with the real world. The core purpose of this study is to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by the South African marketing and communication industry. Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) however point out that only a fraction of the existing knowledge in a field or industry is put into writing. It is therefore vital that the analysis of secondary (literature) data sources be extended with a primary research study to explore

the concept of alternative brand contact – its nature and its role, as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals.

The primary research study is thus undertaken to address a specific problem. That is, it remains to be seen whether the alternative point of brand contact is perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals, to break through clutter to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The inductive process of research reasoning must be extended to involve a primary research study to ultimately produce findings that can serve as guidelines to the development of hypotheses that can in future be tested empirically. It must be stated clearly that the above statement exists as a suggestion or proposition, not as a conjectural statement. This study does not aim to produce inferences purporting to be conclusive but rather findings that can assist in the formulation of hypotheses that with further future research and deductive reasoning can be tested to represent a proof.

The literature study and process of inductive reasoning also produced a number of further propositions that are integral to the above stated **central proposition**. The literature study conducted in Chapter 3 is concluded with an analysis of alternative brand contact requisites. These requisites were found to be critical to the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact. **The ability of the alternative point of brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand is found to depend on the identified requisites.** The research problem thus becomes more layered as the alternative brand contact requisites present further suggestions or **integral propositions** to be explored through the primary research study.

To support the above stated central proposition and to define the integral propositions, the key insights gained from the literature study will next be reinforced. This step is vital as the central proposition and further integral

propositions are core to the problem and purpose of the primary research study.

4.2.1 The Central Proposition and Integral Propositions in Context

The core premise of integrated brand contact planning is that the strength of the brand begins and endures with its ability to consistently deliver on a single-minded brand positioning or promise, at every point of contact. Hence the shift from inside-out to outside-in thinking and from Integrated Marketing Communications to Integrated Brand Contact Planning.

Two important management issues arose from the literature study and analysis of integrated brand contact planning in Chapter Two of this study. Firstly, a Brand Contact Task Team must be introduced to ensure that a brand's points of product, service, planned and unplanned contacts are assessed, planned and managed to deliver a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand positioning.

Secondly and importantly, to enhance the zero-based, outside-in management of points of brand contact, the task team must find a strategic partner in its advertising agency. The agency must demonstrate strategic insight and skill on all levels of brand contact and must ultimately excel in the development of integrated planned brand contact strategies that will contribute to the building of a focussed brand identity. The Integrated Communications Agency best achieves this goal and thus differentiates itself from the traditional departmentalised advertising agency, by a structure and culture based on account teams that apply outside-in, zero-based and media neutral thinking in the development and execution of integrated planned brand contact strategies.

It is within the context of integrated brand contact planning and specifically the scope of planned brand contacts that the nature and role of the alternative brand contact is explored and defined in Chapter Three of this study. **The**

alternative point of brand contact is presented, in keeping with the outside-in and zero-based mindset of integrated brand contact planning, as an unexpected and unconventional point of planned brand contact, whether in the form of traditional or new media. It is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative appeal and not the use of one medium as opposed to another. The qualifying factor is the unconventional and unexpected experience of the point of contact. The challenge is to move beyond, or to manipulate traditional communication vehicles to target consumers in an unconventional manner, when and where they least expect to encounter a commercial message and when they are in a susceptible state of mind.

Two key and interrelated motivating factors establish the need for alternative brand contacts in the planned brand contact environment. Firstly, clients are demanding innovative brand contact solutions within and beyond the tried and trusted, traditional planned brand contact methods. Brand contact innovation is needed in an increasingly competitive, cluttered and fragmented brand communications environment. Secondly, consumers are, as Duncan and Moriarty (1997:91) assert, psychologically conditioning themselves to ignore the brand communications clutter encountered in the market place. As brand communication contacts become more recognisable and cluttered, consumers erect more intensive selective exposure and attention measures. The alternative point of brand contact answers clients' need to introduce unexpected and unconventional points of brand contact that will cut through traditional commercial clutter barriers to reach and impact on consumers when their defenses are down. The alternative brand contact draws attention and achieves impact because it deviates from and is incongruent with expected brand communications activity. The need to apply creative strategic thinking and to innovate alternative brand contact solutions is then also demonstrated through the recent growth of new media owners and the search for unconventional contact opportunities in the traditional media environment, as discussed in Chapter Three (3.3.2).

It is evident that the planners of brand contact strategies can not solely rely on message creativity to break through the commercial clutter barrier. Creative strategic thinking must be applied to introduce unexpected and unconventional brand contacts that will create impact and communicate a single-minded brand positioning. Dru's (1996:35) theory of disruption is particularly pertinent in this regard. An analysis of Dru's theory and creative strategic thinking, with reference to alternative brand contact planning, reveals that insight into the conventional brand communications environment must be applied to formulate brand communication problems or challenges. Creative strategic thinking then delivers alternative perspectives and solutions to the defined challenges. The aim is to develop alternative brand contact solutions that are novel and appropriate to the overall brand contact strategy. Creative strategic thinking is therefore problem-solving in nature and the concept that is produced must as Rossiter and Percy (1997:181) reinforce, be attention getting but also catalytically relevant to the brand positioning. The alternative point of brand contact must be novel, to cut through communications clutter and be noticed, and appropriate, to fulfil its strategic role within the integrated brand contact strategy.

Various creative problem-solving techniques can be employed to stimulate and develop creative ideas, as discussed in Chapter Three (3.4.1). Of greater importance is the mindset of those developing creative ideas. It is the intention to be creative and to break with conventional thinking at the strategic level that is instrumental and therefore vital to creative strategic thinking. The mindset and approach of the account team is paramount in applying creative strategic thinking to produce unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions.

The cross-functional integration of strategic, media and creative skills and expertise into account teams presents an organic structure conducive to creative strategic thinking and the development of innovative brand contact solutions. An assessment of the roles and functions within the account team (Chapter Three: 3.5.1), reveals that the strategic planner's aim to develop a brand contact strategy that will cut through clutter to impact on consumers

and communicate a focussed positioning of the brand, is in synergy with the creative team's motivation to produce fresh and intrusive creative concepts and in keeping with the media planner's goal to deliver contact efficiency. The alternative brand contact is the product of an outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning process fostered within the account team.

The secondary research study culminates in an analysis of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning and thereupon the requisites to effective alternative points of brand contact.

The identified barriers and requisites by and large present a holistic and integrated view of the critical measures that affect the role and nature of the alternative brand contact and the planning thereof. The barriers and requisites are consequently highly pertinent to the focus and orientation of the primary research study.

The barriers to alternative brand contact planning are of particular significance to the primary research study in that they will be applied to set clear parameters to the research objectives of the primary research study. The influence and application of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning will receive close attention in 4.3 of this chapter.

The literature study is concluded with an in depth analysis of alternative brand contact requisites (3.7 of Chapter Three). The alternative brand contact requisites are critical variables to be explored in the primary research study because they present the propositions that are integral to the central proposition, as previously argued. In other words, **the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers, to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand, if the following requisites, now defined as integral propositions are demonstrated:**

- **The unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact is irrespective of its context, whether in the form of traditional or non-traditional media, the result of an outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning process.**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must firstly be novel to be noticed.**
- **To attain impact, the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning.**
- **To create meaningful impact, the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand.**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind (aperture).**
- **To maintain impact, novel alternative brand contacts must be developed continuously or a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed.**

The literature study reveals that the alternative brand contact requisites are critical measures to the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact and thus present integral propositions that must be explored in the primary research study. Further influential variables or possible integral propositions may also exist in the real world that have not been revealed and documented in literature sources. The research study and its design must address this possibility to ensure richness of data is delivered in the process of exploring and defining the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact.

To conclude, the purpose of this study, as a whole, is to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals. The literature study suggests that the nature and role of the alternative brand contact, as an unconventional and unexpected point of planned contact, is to break through clutter to impact on consumers and communicate a single-minded positioning of the brand. This proposition is central to the primary research study. However, to succeed in this strategic goal the alternative point of brand contact must exhibit the requisites identified and stated as integral propositions.

The purpose of the primary research study is to explore the formulated central and integral research propositions in real world terms. The research problem being that the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact can not be justly addressed unless real world perceptions of the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact are fully explored. It remains to be seen whether the alternative brand contact is perceived by the marketing and communication industry in South Africa, to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. To effectively address the research problem and purpose of the primary research study, specific research objectives will next be set.

4.3 The Research Objectives

Burns and Bush (1998:63) and Aaker et al. (1998:48 - 49) explain that a research objective is a statement, in as precise terminology as possible, of what information is needed to satisfy the research purpose. Research objectives are thus related to and determined by the problem definition and when achieved, provide the necessary information to solve the problem.

According to Aaker et al. (1998:48 – 49) certain components must however be in place to present clear-cut research objectives. Specific research questions

must exist for formulated research hypotheses or propositions. Also, and importantly, the scope or boundaries of the research must be clearly defined.

The latter will firstly be addressed in lieu of key insights gained from the literature study, specifically the identification and analysis of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning. The assessment of the barriers to alternative brand contact planning indicates that the alternative brand contact is greatly dependent on a planning environment conducive to the development of unexpected and unconventional brand contact solutions. The barriers to alternative brand contact planning are discussed in depth in 3.6 of Chapter Three and are briefly as follows:

- A traditional departmentalised agency structure, as the cross-functional integration of strategic, media and creative skills and expertise into account teams, is conducive to alternative brand contact planning;
- A lack of outside-in thinking, as seeing the world through the eyes of the consumer will highlight the importance of developing unexpected contact approaches within the cluttered and conventional world of brand communications;
- Media and commission bound biases, as alternative brand contact planning commences from a zero-based, media-neutral planning platform to deliver unexpected and unconventional contact ideas;
- A total reliance on brand message creativity to achieve impact, as alternative brand contacts require that creative strategic thinking is applied to enhance the impact of brand communications;
- Total reliance on computerised media planning systems and measurement data. Alternative brand contacts remain to be judged and require of the client and agency to engage in investigative and explorative strategic activity.

The greatest collective barrier to alternative brand contact planning is mindset. An inside-out, media-biased and measurement bound planning mindset, void of creative strategic purpose and thinking inhibits the process of alternative brand contact planning. It thus stands to reason that a primary research study involving highly departmentalised advertising agencies that exhibit inside-out and media commission based biases and are wholly reliant on computerised media planning systems and measurement data in the planning of brand communication strategies; will stifle the research purpose of this study. Such a study will deliver further insight into the constraints experienced by traditional advertising agencies in developing unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions but will not necessarily present a richness of data with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. Equally so, involving inside-out, media-biased and measurement bound marketers who are hesitant to engage creative strategic thinking, will inhibit the purpose of this research study. As Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:297) point out, clients and agencies alike must exhibit a willingness to investigate and break with conventional moulds to be experimental.

To achieve the purpose of this study and to address the defined research problem the barriers to alternative brand contact planning are employed to set parameters to the primary research study and to define research objectives in precise terminology as possible. **The primary research study will therefore explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients.**

It stands to reason that the Integrated Communications Agency has purposefully rid itself of the planning constraints experienced in a highly departmentalised and traditional agency environment. To be totally objective and realistic it must not be assumed that all Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exhibit a wholly outside-in, zero based, media neutral and creative strategic planning mindset. The assumption however is that they are, based on an integrated brand communications planning focus, a great deal closer to a planning mindset that is conducive to alternative brand

contact planning. The organic nature of the integrated account team, as reasoned by Robbins (1994:400) and Monge, Cozzens and Contractor (1992:250-274), is a catalyst for integrated strategic and creative brainstorming and therefore for alternative brand contact planning. Equally so, it is assumed that clients of Integrated Communications Agencies demonstrate a need to develop a relationship with a communications partner that will meet expectations and add greater value to the process of brand building.

With full cognisance of the parameters to the primary research study, specific research questions will next be introduced, as proposed by Burns and Bush (1998:63) and Aaker et al. (1998:49). The research questions specifically address the identified central and integral research propositions with the ultimate aim to solve the research problem. The research questions to follow then also serve as the objectives to the primary research study:

Given the central proposition as defined in 4.2 of this chapter the **primary objective** of the research study is to determine:

If the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact is perceived by South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients to be to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand?

To address the research problem and purpose of this study effectively, the propositions that have been identified as integral to the central research proposition must also be explored in real world terms. The alternative brand contact requisites or integral research propositions identified in 4.2 of this chapter consequently present the **supporting objectives** to the primary research study and aim to determine:

Whether South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients are of the opinion that:

- **The unexpected and unconventional point of brand contact is irrespective of its context, whether in the form of traditional or non-traditional media, the result of an outside-in, zero-based, media neutral and creative strategic planning process?**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must firstly be novel to be noticed?**
- **To attain impact, the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning?**
- **To create meaningful impact, the alternative brand contact must, in message content and form, communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand?**
- **To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind (aperture)?**
- **To maintain impact, novel alternative brand contacts must be developed continuously or that a sustainable alternative brand contact that can be improved upon must be employed?**

Each of the above questions or objectives is relevant and specific to the purpose of this research study and presents the primary and supporting objectives to the primary research study. If these objectives are effectively carried out as Burns and Bush (1998:63) argue, the data produced will solve the research problem. The role and nature of the alternative brand contact, as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals, in the form of Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients, will be effectively explored to ultimately produce findings that can guide the development of plausible hypotheses for future empirical testing.

In further pursuit of a systematic and planned approach to the research project, as Aaker et al. (1998:41) advocate, an appropriate research design will next be introduced with the aim to address the above formulated research objectives.

4.4 The Research Design

The research design presents the plan to be followed to answer the research problem and objectives. In context of the purpose and objectives of the research study, Cooper and Schindler (1998:130) reason that a study is viewed as either exploratory or formal. The distinction is essentially based on the degree of research structure and research question crystallisation and will furthermore influence whether the study lends itself to quantitative or qualitative research design and output. These dimensions will next be investigated whereupon the research design of this study will be introduced.

4.4.1 Exploratory Research

According to Cooper and Schindler (1998:134) an exploratory research design is appropriate when the research area is new and vague, when important variables may not be known or may as of yet, not be clearly defined. Exploratory research is characterised by a loose research structure to gain a better understanding of the research environment relevant to the research problem. The primary purpose of exploration is to clarify and crystallise research propositions and/or questions in order to conduct further research.

According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:39) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:60-61) exploration typically begins with a thorough secondary research study. This involves a search for published data and the opinions of well-informed people who have clearly stated positions on the controversial aspects of the study. Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) however point out that although secondary research is a rich source of possible proposition and

hypothesis formulation, only a fraction of the existing knowledge in a field or industry is put into writing. It is therefore important that the analysis of secondary data be extended with primary exploratory research.

Exploratory research consequently entails sourcing of information from insightful sources with experience in the field of the study rather than sourcing of information from a cross-section of the population. The research approach is therefore also flexible in that it allows further investigation of avenues that emerge during the study. The research information obtained, coupled with a thorough secondary study of the research field then enables the researcher to clarify and/or crystallise research questions and propositions to enable the future development of hypotheses to formal research studies.

4.4.2 Formal Research

A formal research study is employed to test hypotheses or validate deductions. According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:42) the first challenge is to determine whether the formal research study will be descriptive or causal. This decision is based on the objectives of the research study.

A descriptive study is conducted to answer who, what, where and how research questions. Implicit in descriptive research is that the underlying relationships of the problem area are understood. McDaniel and Gates (1996:42) and Burns and Bush (1998:65) continue to explain that a causal research study in turn investigates whether one variable causes or determines the value of another variable. A variable is defined as a symbol or concept that assumes any one of a set of values. An independent variable is presumed or expected to cause or influence the dependent variable. The independent variable being the symbol or concept over which the researcher has some control or can manipulate to some extent. The dependent variable being the symbol or concept expected to be explained or caused by the independent variable. A causal study will, for example, investigate whether

the level of advertising (independent variable) determines the level of sales (dependent variable).

The relationship between descriptive and causal research is a supportive one. Descriptive research will determine that two variables are somehow related. It sheds light on relationships or associations and thus supports the selection of variables for a causal study. The causal study in turn will provide reasonable proof that these relationships or associations exist.

4.4.3 Quantitative or Qualitative Research Design and Output

Given the nature of the research design, explorative and/or formal and the decision to implement descriptive or causal formal research methods, a study lends itself to quantitative or qualitative research design and output. McDaniel and Gates (1996:174-175) explain that the concept of quality essentially describes the essential measure of something, whilst the concept of quantity defines the amount thereof. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:305) and Aaker et al. (1998:186-187, 203-204) elaborate that qualitative research seeks information related to respondents' motivations, beliefs and attitudes.

An intuitive approach is encountered in gathering data and the format of data collection is open-ended. Qualitative research is not intended to deliver statistically or scientifically accurate data but rather data with depth, richness of context and new insights and perspectives. Quantitative research on the other hand is employed to quantify or precisely measure a research problem. Sophisticated statistical procedures and scientifically drawn samples are implemented, to ultimately produce conclusive research.

The purpose of explorative research is to source meaning. Exploratory research, according to Cooper and Schindler (1998:134) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:174-175), thus rely more heavily on qualitative rather than quantitative research techniques. The challenge is to gain much information per respondent through probing questions. Smaller numbers of respondents

and a longer, more flexible relationship with the respondent are therefore encountered in the research process. The analysis of research data, as also confirmed by Kinnear and Taylor (1996:305), is more interpretative.

Quantitative research on the other hand, tends to be more descriptive or causal and analysis more statistical and summarative. Structured questions with predetermined response options are typically employed, with a large number of respondents involved.

The popularity of qualitative research in particular is, according to McDaniel and Gates (1996:175), growing unabated. This is not only because qualitative research is cheaper than quantitative research, but also and more importantly, because qualitative research delivers much insight into in-depth motivations and feelings. McDaniel and Gates support that data delivered through qualitative research are “rich, human, subtle and often very revealing”.

4.4.4 The Research Design of this Study

Global as well as local published data and recognised industry publications and journals have been consulted and analysed in Chapters Two and Three of this study, to gain insight into the concept of integrated brand contact planning and the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. The opinions of international and local industry professionals on the topic have been investigated and discussed.

Although the secondary research study has presented a rich source of proposition formulation, it must be extended with primary exploratory research. As previously argued (4.2), the process of inductive reasoning will be incomplete if not supported by primary exploratory research. Firstly, because as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134) reason, the research area is new and important variables may not be known. The study positions the shift from Integrated Marketing Communications to Integrated Brand Contact Planning as a recent phenomenon and the unconventional and unexpected

point of brand contact as a new concept. Secondly, because as Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) forewarn, only a fraction of the existing knowledge in a field or industry is normally put into writing.

An exploratory research design is highly relevant and appropriate to this study. The perceived nature and role of the alternative brand contact in the environment of integrated brand contact planning is yet to be fully explored. The central and integral research propositions derived from the literature study must be explored in real world terms to investigate the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact as perceived by South African marketing and communication professionals, in specific Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients. An investigation of the nature of the alternative brand contact will explore its status as an unconventional and unexpected brand contact and the need for outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic thinking and planning therein. An investigation of the role of the alternative point of brand contact will explore its perceived means of breaking through communication clutter, to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand.

This study is explorative and will source and probe meaning to investigate the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. This study will therefore also be qualitative in nature to reveal in-depth attitudes, opinions and motivations. It is not the intent of this study to prove that a causal relationship does in fact exist between the alternative brand contact (independent variable) and its ability to break through clutter, to create impact and communicate the focussed positioning of the brand (dependent variables). Although such a study will add significant value to the field of brand communications planning, it is vital that the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact first be explored, as perceived by South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients. It must firstly emerge that the variables involved in this study are perceived as related, before the actual relationships can be put to the test.

This study presents a qualitative exploratory research design that will shed light on the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact in cutting through clutter to create impact and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning. The research study will therefore present a solid foundation to a possible future formal causal study by developing and presenting findings that can be applied in the development of hypotheses.

4.5 The Research Method: The Selection of Data Sources

The literature study (Chapters Two and Three) presented an investigation of the context, nature and role of alternative points of brand contact, based on an analysis of pertinent global and local academic books and periodicals - industry magazines, newspapers and academic journals. To conduct a scientific primary research study, it is equally important to identify and apply an appropriate method of primary data source selection.

According to Sudman and Blair (1998:88) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:131) primarily two methods of primary data source or information selection are encountered in research. The first entails monitoring or observational studies, which imply that people, objects or events are observed. The researcher inspects the activities of a subject or the nature of material without eliciting responses. The behavioural patterns of people, objects and occurrences are systematically recorded without questioning or communicating with them. Observational data is however only applicable if the phenomenon of interest is observable and if it occurs often or predictably enough, to be studied within a realistic period of time. According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:44) observation research is typically descriptive.

The second form of primary research is based on interrogation or communication processes in the questioning of people, and is referred to as the self-report data method. The researcher questions subjects to collect their responses by personal or impersonal means. Sudman and Blair (1998:83)

explain that respondent self-report data methods essentially involve survey interviews, focus groups and depth interviews. McDaniel and Gates (1996:44) point out that survey research is often descriptive in nature although it can also be applied in a causal research design. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:321) furthermore reason that depth interviews and focus groups in turn are typically employed in exploratory research.

A third method of data collection is identified by McDaniel and Gates (1996:44) in the form of experimentation. Experiments almost always aim to measure causality. One or more variables are changed to observe the effect of change on another variable. The research aim is to demonstrate that a change in one variable causes some predictable change in another variable.

Given the intent of this study, that is to explore the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact and the focus on a qualitative exploratory research design, the self-report data method will be investigated in greater depth.

4.5.1 The Self-Report Data Method

The three self-report data measures identified by Sudman and Blair (1998:83) are survey interviews, focus groups and depth interviews and will next be discussed with reference to the research purpose of this study. The specific data measures to be employed in exploring the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact will receive close attention.

a) Survey Interviews

Survey interviews are a commonly used self-report method and entail the development and use of a fixed questionnaire with pre-specified questions. According to Sudman and Blair (1998:154) surveys are typically conducted in one of four forms, namely, personal surveys, interceptive surveys, telephone

and mail surveys. Broad coverage of the respondent population can be obtained as the relatively low cost of the method allows for contact with many respondents. The relatively low demand on respondents also tends to encourage high participation.

However, the greatest weakness of the survey method and the reason why it is not an appropriate data source method for this study, is that respondents' seated opinions, feelings and hidden motivations can not be probed effectively. Although solid data about the population at large can be obtained, limited data about the individual respondent can be gained.

Depth attitudes, opinions and motivations must be sourced to effectively explore and describe the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact as perceived by South African Integrated Communication Agencies and their clients. Two further self-report data methods can be instrumental in achieving this, namely focus groups and depth interviews.

b) Focus Groups and Depth Interviews

As is the case with surveys, focus groups and depth interviews apply self-reports to obtain information. These methods do however not use fixed questionnaires. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:305) explain that focus groups and depth interviews are unstructured-direct techniques. No rigid format is followed but respondents are queried directly about the issues at hand. The objective is to cover identified topics to moderate a respondent's flow of thoughts on the topics. Sudman and Blair (1998:184) also argue that with focus groups and depth interviews, a longer period of time (90 to 120 minutes for focus groups and 30 to 90 minutes for depth interviews) is devoted to cover a narrow range of topics. Individual opinions and motivations can therefore be probed to produce rich and revealing data.

Sudman and Blair (1998:184) explain that both focus groups and depth interviews are based on the philosophy of psychoanalytic interviewing. The

unstructured discussion approach allows respondents to divulge and share their own opinions and beliefs in their own natural language employing their own natural structure. Psychoanalytic methods are based on the premise, that true attitudes and feelings will emerge as a topic is discussed at length.

Sudman and Blair accordingly conclude that the strength of focus groups and depth interviews is essentially three fold:

- A great deal of information can be obtained from each respondent.
- Complex information about attitudes or motivations can be gained.
- How respondents structure the topic of interest can be uncovered.

The advantages delivered by depth interviews and focus groups as data collection measures do however come at a cost. The length and personal requirements of these methods make them very expensive and consequently limit the number that can be conducted. The number of respondents willing to co-operate are also reduced as a result of the length of the interview.

However, given the research purpose of this study, the value of the focus group and depth interview by far outweighs the above constraints. The concept and practise of alternative brand contact planning is not widely documented in secondary research data and emerges as a new phenomenon in the field of marketing communications. The alternative brand contact concept is in an exploratory research stage. Attitudes, opinions and motivations with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact must therefore be investigated through data collection measures that will allow for exploration and probing. A fixed questionnaire with pre-specified questions as applied in survey interviews, will not be conducive to the research process and purpose. To effectively investigate the formulated central and integral research propositions and achieve the identified research objectives, the opinions, attitudes and motivations of respondents must be explored. Research time must be invested to tap into a carefully selected sample of respondents' flow of thought on the nature, role

and planning of alternative points of brand contact, rather than to obtain more limited data from the population at large.

Both focus groups and depth interviews will be employed to support the qualitative explorative design of this research study. The nature of both these data collection instruments will next be discussed whereupon their role and merit within the context of the study will be reasoned.

4.6 The Individual Depth Interview

The individual depth interview entails an unstructured conversation or personal interview on a defined topic between a respondent and an interviewer. It is a one-on-one research method that aims to probe and elicit detailed answers to questions. Kahan (1990:8-9) states that the depth interview aims to get below respondents' surface responses to uncover the more fundamental reasons underlying the respondent's attitudes. Opinions and motivations are thus obtained that will, in all probability, not surface in a structured interview.

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:321) point out that both the focus group and the depth interview are primarily employed in exploratory research and are valuable techniques in developing hypotheses. In comparing the depth interview to the focus group, McDaniel and Gates (1996:198) and Sudman and Blair (1998:196), however, argue that the depth interview essentially ensures that all respondents express their opinions on the same topic. Group dynamics and possible group pressure that can be encountered in the focus group are eliminated to ensure that the individual respondent is the focus of attention. More information is revealed as more time is devoted to an individual respondent. The respondent can thus be probed at length to elicit true motivations. Greater flexibility furthermore exists as casual remarks and tangential issues that may provide valuable insight can be further questioned and explored. Payne, quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:445) thus confirms that depth interviews do not only provide more detail but also deliver personal

preferences and idiosyncracies. Subtleties, nuances and shades of difference masked in focus groups are more readily revealed. Rogers (1989:9-10) elaborates that in the depth interview the interviewer also establishes a higher level of rapport with the respondent. Responses are, as a result, given more freely than in focus groups. Depth interviews consequently deliver greater depth and point of view.

Dillon, Madden and Firtle (1993:141) and Tull and Hawkins (1993:443) thus conclude that depth interviews are particularly appropriate when:

- Detailed probing of respondents' opinions and attitudes are required.
- Subject matter tends to be personal or confidential.
- Subject matter is of an emotionally charged nature.
- Acceptable norms exist that may result in conformity in a group discussion.
- Detailed decision-making patterns are required.
- Professional people are interviewed on subject matter related to their jobs.

4.6.1 Types of Depth Interviews and Related Procedures

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:320), in agreement with Sudman and Blair (1998:184), confirm that depth interviews generally last an hour or more to provide sufficient time to probe respondents opinions and motivations on a range of research topics. Aaker et al. (1998:189-190) and Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock (1999:64) collectively identify three basic types of depth interviews, namely, non-directive, standardised and semi-structured or focussed interviews. The difference between the data collection instruments essentially lie in the amount of guidance provided by the interviewer.

In the non-directive interview, as also reinforced by Dane (1990:129), the respondent has the maximum freedom to respond within the confines of topics of interest to the interviewer. According to Aaker et al. (1998:189) the success of this method depends on the interviewer's skill in creating an open and relaxed relationship and probing responses to pursue motivations without

biasing the content of responses or losing control over the focus of the interview. A standardised interview on the other hand employs strict protocol. The interviewer works with a formal interview schedule, question wording is exactly repeated and the order in which questions are listed is observed. Where further information is required the interviewer employs prompts in a standardised and neutralised way.

It is the semi-structured interview, as a third depth interview vehicle, that is particularly appropriate to this study. The semi-structured or focussed depth interview is designed to promote an active, open-ended dialogue, as does the non-directive interview. The interviewer does however retain control of the terms of the discussion by referring to an interview guide that identifies the issues to be covered. Lindlof, quoted in Deacon et al (1999:65) thus describes the semi-structured interview technique as a *conversation with a purpose*.

Although the interviewer covers a specific list of topics or sub areas in the form of predetermined questions, the timing, exact wording and sequencing of questions are left to the interviewer's discretion. Dane (1990:129) and Tull and Hawkins (1993:442), in agreement, point out that because the interviewer has the freedom to create questions and apply probing, the network of meanings in responses are uncovered in a semi-structured interview. Respondents are able to articulate their thoughts and opinions on their own terms, which enhances the opportunity to explore complex and sensitive issues. Comprehension is enhanced as the freedom to elaborate exists and questions can be rephrased to ensure understanding.

Deacon et al. (1999:69) however point out that the greatest threat in a semi-structured interview is interviewer bias. The researcher and/or interviewer must at all times be sensitive not to encourage certain types of responses or to demonstrate any biased interviewing influence. The challenge is to give respondents the freedom to develop their thoughts in the order they want without any biased intervention, while retaining a sense of the research framework and purpose. The authors do however also conclude that the semi-structured interview, when effectively managed, is enormously valuable when

investigating “complex and uncharted areas”, as are frequently encountered in exploratory research.

Aaker et al. (1998:189) furthermore elaborate that the semi-structured interview is especially appropriate to interviewing busy professionals or ‘thought leaders’. As Dane (1990:129) explains, the focussed interview is typically used to research specific groups chosen for their familiarity with the research topic. In this type of depth interview a quid pro quo, such as a summary, is often also employed to gain co-operation, direct and manage the interview.

The semi-structured interview approach is highly appropriate to this study. As previously reasoned, the alternative point of brand contact is a new concept, and the context in which it is applied namely, integrated brand contact planning, is a recent phenomenon. An interviewing technique that will allow for respondents to articulate their thoughts and opinions whilst exploring new ideas that may arise, will be conducive to the nature and purpose of this study.

Professional people are furthermore involved in this study and the aim is to probe their personal perceptions, possible charged opinions and underlying motivations with regard the nature and role of the alternative brand contact in breaking through clutter to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning.

4.7 The Focus Group

Tull and Hawkins (1993:450) and Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1) reinforce that the focus group as a data collection method, is particularly valuable in qualitative exploratory research. It is an innovative method to gather data, especially when limited information is available or when the topic of interest is a new one. The focus group as an exploratory research technique thus enables the development of hypotheses for future testing.

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) define the focus group as a “loosely structured interactive discussion conducted by a trained moderator among a small group of respondents simultaneously”. A focus group usually consists of six to twelve fairly homogeneous respondents, led by a moderator in an in-depth discussion on one particular concept or topic. The moderator allows for subjects to be explored in discussion and ensures that respondents stimulate one another in the process. As opposed to the role of the interviewer in depth interviews, the moderator as Aaker et al. (1998:191) point out, plays a more passive role. The aim is to learn what respondents have to say and why. They are given the freedom and are encouraged to talk at length and in detail about the subject at hand. The moderator must however ensure that interesting comments, related to the objectives of the focus group, are followed up with probing questions. Proctor (1997:155) states that guided by the moderator, minds thus range freely and through interaction with each other, respondents “produce ideas and suggestions that exhibit synergy”. Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308), in agreement, believe that the value of the focus group lies in its potential to discover the unexpected, through the free-flow of group discussion.

The focus group method is however criticised, in comparison to individual interviews, because less information is gained from individual respondents. Focus groups, as Tull and Hawkins (1993:451) point out, are deemed to be less complete at the individual level as respondents may not all comment on all topics covered in the discussion. May (1993:95) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:178) however conclude that the key motivator for using focus groups, as opposed to depth interviews, is to investigate group dynamics. The researcher employs a focus group to study a concept in context of group interaction. The essential postulate is the idea that a response from one individual becomes a stimulus for another. An interplay of responses are consequently generated that may yield more than if the same number of people had contributed independently. More about a topic is told and in greater depth, as respondents are encouraged to act spontaneously.

The less structured nature of focus groups presents, according to Morgan (1988:12) and Dillon et al. (1993:138), more detailed in-depth responses and information that will otherwise not have been obtained. As Morgan (1988:12) reasons, focus groups produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. Tull and Hawkins (1993:450) and Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1), in agreement, confirm that the group synergy encountered in the focus group offers more stimulation and fosters more creativity. As a result, the focus group provides greater range of thought, ideas and experiences. The advantages of focus groups are summarised by Kinnear and Taylor (1996:319) as follows:

- Synergism: The combined group effect of the focus group produces a wider range of information, insight and ideas.
- Snowballing: Individual comments trigger responses from other participants.
- Stimulation: Respondents want to express their ideas as the involvement level of the group increases.
- Security: Respondents generally realise that opinions are not greatly different and become more willing to express their own ideas.
- Spontaneity: Responses become more spontaneous and less conventional thus revealing a more accurate picture of respondents' true opinions.
- Serendipity: More often in focus groups than in depth interviews ideas will "drop out of the blue".
- Scientific scrutiny: Data can be recorded and played back for scrutiny.

4.7.1 Types of Focus Groups and General Procedures

Calder (1977:353-364) and Aaker et al. (1998:192-194) classify focus groups into three major categories namely, clinical, experiencing and exploratory groups.

- *Clinical focus groups* present qualitative research in its purest form. Research is undertaken as a scientific endeavour to uncover the true motivations and feelings that are subconscious in nature. A highly skilled moderator with expertise in psychology and sociology probes beneath the level of consciousness, employing clinical judgement, to entice participants into revealing their true motivations.
- *Experiencing focus groups* are frequently employed in marketing research to gain insight into how consumers for example, experience products in use. The researcher is thus enabled to experience the emotional framework in which a product is used. Consumer satisfactions, dissatisfactions, rewards and frustrations are consequently better understood.
- *Exploratory focus groups* as reinforced by Aaker et al. (1998:192), are typically used at the exploratory phase of the research process in order to assist generating hypotheses for testing or concepts for further research. In this context Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) assert that the topical objective of the focus group is to explore a new concept through free discussion. This quality is particularly conducive to exploratory research as unexpected and new opinions and attitudes can emerge and a depth of understanding is gained on the core research issues. The qualitative data produced by exploratory focus groups is then applied to enrich research propositions or hypotheses, and to present guidelines for identifying effective future research design options. Proctor (1997:158) concludes that exploratory focus groups present a unique value: “they can explore customary ways of doing things or customary beliefs, and possible reactions to something new. They can try to determine why such conditions exist and what can be done to change them”.

As previously stated by Sudman and Blair (1998:184) the typical focus group lasts 90 to a 120 minutes. This period of time is needed, according to Kinnear and Taylor (1996:311), to establish a rapport with respondents and to explore in depth their beliefs, attitudes and opinions.

According to Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) the focus group procedure is marked by three stages:

Stage One: The moderator establishes rapport with the group and clearly communicates the objectives of the discussion. Templeton, quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) points out that in conducting the focus group it is appropriate to initiate a predisposition discussion and introduce materials in the form of for example, a concept.

Stage Two: The moderator provokes intense discussion in areas relevant to the research objectives. Tull and Hawkins (1993:319) reason that respondents must feel stimulated to want to express their ideas and feelings.

Stage Three: The moderator summarises the group responses to determine the extent to which agreement exists and requests of respondents to complete a brief demographic questionnaire before leaving.

Potts (1990:12-13), Henderson (1992:20-23) and McDonald (1994:161-168) assert that the role of the moderator is of prime importance to the success of focus group procedures. The moderator must ensure that the stages of the focus group, as outlined above, are effectively managed, that the degree of probing and depth of insight are sufficient to achieve research objectives and that no bias is introduced into the findings. Henderson (1992: 20-23) specifically stresses that the moderator must have skill, experience and knowledge of the research topic and must also exhibit intuitive insights into the nature of group dynamics to create and maintain a high degree of interaction within the group.

Focus groups are most frequently captured on video and/or audiotape to be transcribed to a typed record. The aim is to draw important themes or ideas from the transcript and to write a narrative that reports these ideas as well as their implications. The emphasis is not on a quantitative report of how many respondents said something but rather on what was said. Verbatim comments must be used to illustrate themes and ideas. According to Sudman and Blair

(1998:195) a focus group report must “ read like a story rather than a series of tables”.

This study is based on a qualitative exploratory research design as previously motivated. The application of focus groups and in particular the exploratory focus group as a data collection instrument, is thus highly appropriate to the research focus of this study. The value of the semi-structured or focussed depth interview and the exploratory focus group will next be discussed in context of the nature and purpose of this study.

4.8 The Depth Interview and Focus Group in Application

The decision to apply both semi-structured depth interviews and exploratory focus groups is based on the nature of integrated brand contact planning and the role of the alternative brand contact within the planned brand contact strategy. As discussed in Chapter Three of this study, the process of integrated brand contact planning involves both the client Brand Contact Task Team and the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency. Both role players must be involved in the primary research study to gain an objective and balanced view on the identified research propositions and related research objectives. The application of exploratory focus groups will firstly be considered in terms of the research purpose and appropriate data collection, whereupon the role of semi-structured interviews will be reasoned. In completion a diagram that demonstrates the data collection phases and procedures to be implemented in this study, will be introduced.

4.8.1 The Exploratory Focus Group in Application

The account team functions as a strategic partner to the client. Firstly, to compliment and advise on the holistic integration of all points of brand contact and secondly, to excel in the development of effective, integrated and innovative planned brand contact solutions. The alternative brand contact

relies on the cross-functional integration of skills and expertise within the account team. The development of a point of contact that is both novel and appropriate to the brand contact strategy involves as Nickerson (1999:419) eludes, a confluence of resources. Creative strategic thinking is possible because the strategic goal to break through clutter to create impact and communicate a focussed brand identity, is in synergy with the creative motivation to produce concepts that are fresh and intrusive and in line with the media objective to deliver contact efficiency. The organic nature of the integrated account team, as justified by Robbins (1994:400) and Monge et al. (1992:250-274), is a catalyst for integrated strategic and creative brainstorming and thus for alternative brand contact planning.

Given the above assessment, a clear line of synergy emerges between the nature of alternative brand contact planning and that of the focus group as a data collection instrument. The focus group like the account team involves a group of fairly homogeneous individuals and relies on the premise that respondents stimulate one another in discussion to produce ideas and suggestions that exhibit synergy. The key motivator for using focus groups, as May (1993:95) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:178) point out, is to investigate a concept in context of group dynamics. The development of an alternative point of brand contact, in turn is reliant on the dynamics of the account team as a cross-functional unit.

The alternative brand contact is furthermore the product of creative strategic thinking, within the account team. The group synergy encountered in the focus group in comparison fosters as Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1) assert, more creativity and therefore provides for a greater range of thought, ideas and experiences. Proctor (1997:158) specifically addresses the unique value of the exploratory focus group in this regard. Customary ways or beliefs can be investigated and challenged to explore new possibilities. This quality in particular, presents the exploratory focus group as a relevant and appropriate method for exploring the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, as perceived by account teams within Integrated Communication Agencies.

Aaker et al. (1998:192) furthermore reason that the exploratory focus group is typically applied in the exploratory phase of the research process to assist generating hypotheses or developing concepts for future testing. With reference to this study the focus groups with account teams will be employed to assist in enriching the central and integral research propositions. To attain this objective to the full and to ensure that **rich and revealing data is produced this study will focus on senior account teams, the teams with range and depth of insight and experience, in Integrated Communications Agencies.** Deacon et al. (1999:56) also state that focus groups are defined on either a pre-constituted (already existing) or researcher constituted (self-created) basis.

This study will involve pre-constituted exploratory focus groups in the form of existing senior account teams, to leverage the organic nature of both working models, in exploring the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact through free discussion. The data produced and key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups will then be employed, as proposed by Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137), to enrich the defined research propositions.

4.8.2 The Semi-structured Depth Interview in Application

The depth interview as Kahan (1990:8-9) asserts, is employed to ensure that the fundamental reasons underlying respondents attitudes are uncovered and that all respondents as McDaniel and Gates (1996:198) and Sudman and Blair (1998:196) confirm, express their personal opinions on the defined research propositions. For these reasons the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies will be followed with two layers of semi-structured depth interviews.

The focus group exploration with senior account teams will firstly be followed with semi-structured depth interviews involving clients of the interviewed senior account teams. Secondly, semi-structured depth interviews involving

the thought leaders, as described by Aaker et al. (1998), or in context of this study, the key players within the interviewed senior account teams, will follow. This approach to data collection aims to ensure that the central and integral research propositions and key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups are effectively and objectively researched. The application of semi-structured depth interviews with clients will firstly be addressed whereupon the interviews with key account team members will be motivated.

a) The Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Clients

Clients are increasingly demanding of their communications partners to produce unconventional and unexpected brand contact solutions. As Oosthuizen (1996:35), Duncan and Moriarty (1997:5), Herber (2000:7) and Duncan (2002:369) assert, clients are seeking brand contact solutions beyond the tried and trusted, mostly traditional brand communication methods. The need for alternative points of planned brand contact is enforced by clients as they expect of their communication partners to develop points of contact that will break through commercial clutter barriers to create impact and communicate or reinforce a focussed brand positioning. It is therefore vital that the marketers of brands are involved in the research study to explore and describe their opinions, attitudes and motivations with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. However, the primary research study will not involve the entire Brand Contact Task Team in this regard.

The Brand Contact Task Team fulfils an integral role in ensuring that all points of product, service, planned and unplanned brand contact communicate and reinforce a single-minded and integrated brand positioning. To achieve integration of brand communication messages throughout the organisation the Brand Contact Task Team comprises, as Duncan (2002:90) and other authors explain, of representatives from every major department and division. Although this study is contextualised in the practice of integrated brand contact management, it is not the primary focus of the study. The focus is on the planned brand contact environment and the nature and role of the

alternative point of brand contact therein. **For this reason the primary research study will involve the Marketing or Brand Manager responsible for briefing and managing the senior account team within the Integrated Communications Agency.** The aim is then to effectively explore and describe his/her perceptions of the nature and role of the alternative brand contact in breaking through commercial clutter to create impact and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning.

The core motivator for applying the semi-structured depth interview, as a one-on-one data collection method, to explore and describe the perceptions of the Marketing or Brand Manager is that, as Dillon et al. (1993:141) argue, their personal and potentially charged opinions can be uncovered. Considering that clients are putting greater pressure on their communications partners to deliver solutions beyond the expected, depth interviews are ideally suited to ensure that Marketing or Brand Managers divulge and share their thoughts, opinions and beliefs on their own terms. The semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers will also be focussed on the enriched research propositions, as developed in response to key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams. The Marketing or Brand Managers will therefore be responding to not only insight gained from a study of literature but also to the opinions, attitudes and motivations of real-life and experienced account teams.

b) The Semi-structured Depth Interviews with Key Account Team Members

In completion to the data collection procedures, the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and the individual depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers will be followed with a final set of semi-structured depth interviews. These interviews will involve as Aaker et al. (1998:189) propose, the 'thought leaders' within the interviewed senior account teams. The final set of semi-structured depth interviews will therefore focus on the Strategic Planner, Media Planner and

Creative Director within the senior account teams involved in this study. The roles of these account team members were identified and discussed in 3.5.1 of Chapter Three and as motivated, are interrelated and jointly critical to the planning of alternative points of brand contact.

The semi-structured depth interviews with the thought leaders in the interviewed senior account teams are undertaken in completion of data collection procedures, for four critical reasons:

- Firstly, the aim of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies is purely to explore the perceived nature and role of alternative points of brand contact through free discussion. So doing, new or fresh attitudes and opinions will be uncovered. The focus group insights will then be applied as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) propose, to enrich the defined central and integral research propositions. The aim of the semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members is to purposefully address and explore the enriched research propositions in order to gain depth of thought.
- Secondly, the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers are employed to uncover personal opinions and beliefs with regard the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, as defined through the enriched central and integral research propositions. A balanced and objective assessment of the research propositions can only be obtained if the same measure is applied with key account team members.
- Thirdly, the alternative point of brand contact is ultimately the product of the outside-in, zero- based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning mindset fostered within the account team. Rich and revealing data will be obtained as the semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members will not only focus on the enriched research propositions produced by the exploratory focus groups, but also on the key insights gained from the individual depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers.

- Fourthly and finally, as Dillan et al. (1993:141) and Tull and Hawkins (1993:443) assert, possible norms that may have existed within the focus groups with senior account teams and consequently may have masked shades of difference, will be uncovered through the depth interviews. As more time is devoted to individual respondents, personal thoughts and opinions can be articulated in greater depth and true motivations uncovered as respondents are probed at length.

The following diagram (Diagram 1: Research Method Process), has been designed to illustrate the phases of data collection to be implemented in this study. The diagram demonstrates that exploratory focus groups will firstly be conducted with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The key insights gained from the free flow in discussion on the perceived nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact will be employed to enrich the defined central and integral research propositions. The exploratory focus groups are then followed with semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the interviewed senior account teams and thereupon with key members of the senior account teams. The semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers will essentially focus on the enriched research propositions developed in response to the focus group findings. The semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members will also encompass key insights gained from the interviews conducted with the Marketing or Brand Managers.

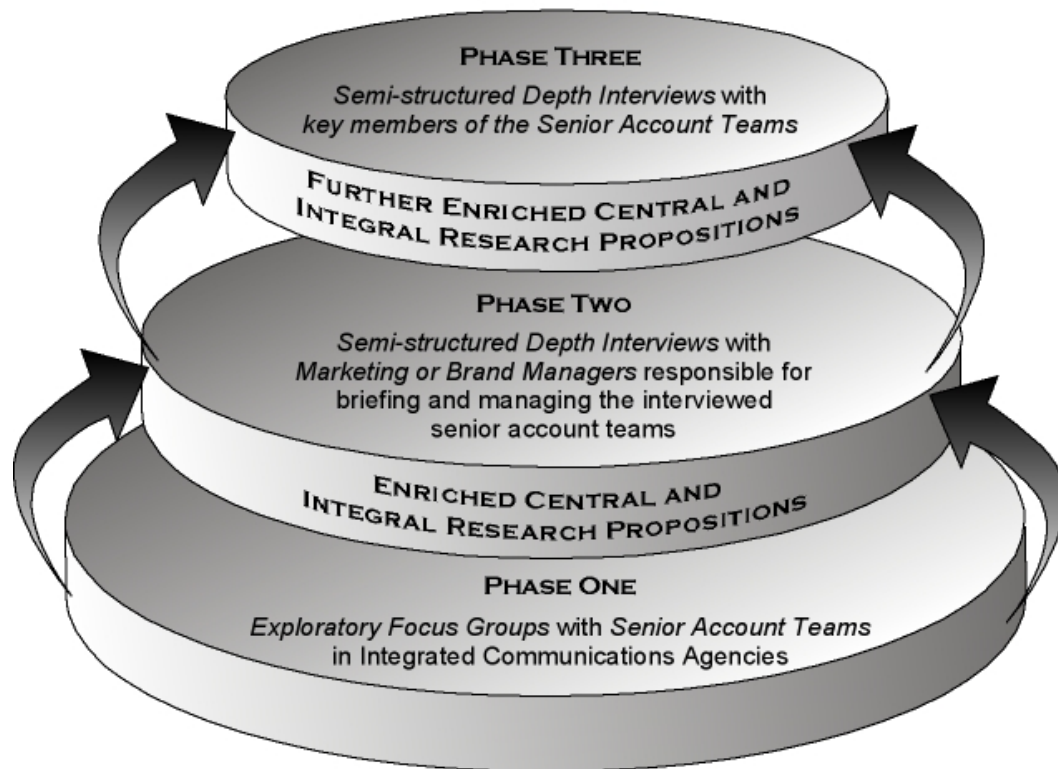


Diagram 1: Research Method Process

A set of two interview guides will next be introduced with the aim to present a clear and focussed research design to the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key account team members.

4.9 The Interview Guides

Two individual interview guides will direct on the one hand, the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and on the other, the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key members of the senior account teams.

The research questions in the interview guides are purposefully designed in keeping with the nature of the semi-structured interviewing method and the free-flow purpose of the exploratory focus group. Consequently, open-ended questions, as opposed to closed questions, are introduced. The open question unlike the closed question does not provide response categories. According to Sudman and Blair (1998:268) a richness of data is thus obtained as respondents articulate their responses and as new ideas are presented and explored. Deacon et al. (1999:72) furthermore assert that when perceptions, attitudes and beliefs are being explored, as is the case in this research study, the interviewing technique must allow for a disparate range of issues pertaining to the research objectives, to emerge. An open question approach attains this aim and ensures true perceptions, opinions, attitudes and motivations are uncovered.

The respective interview guides are furthermore designed to initiate, as Lindlof (1999:65) reasons, conversations with purpose in the semi-structured depth interviews and a loosely structured and interactive free-flow in focus group discussions, as Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308), propose. The qualitative and exploratory nature of the data collection techniques applied in this study consequently also has a direct bearing on the ordering and presentation of questions. Deacon et al. (1999:72-74) accordingly suggest that single blunt questions must be avoided and that general, easy to address questions must be employed to create a relaxing and reassuring environment before challenging, detailed or complex reasoning commences.

The researcher/moderator can also ensure that clarification and amplification of responses are gained as the interview or discussion progresses, by applying follow-up guidance and encouragement, formally known as probing. Webb (1950:363) in support reasons that the more naturalistic the interview conversation the better. The more the focus group or depth interview resembles everyday talk, the more forthcoming the information. The interview guides developed for this study will thus reflect a natural conversational structure and an open questioning approach allowing for probing, to create an

interview approach that is ideally suited to the qualitative exploratory purpose and design of this research study.

The interview guides, their structure and content, will next be discussed in lieu of the research design and purpose of this study. The primary research purpose being, to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, as perceived by Integrated Communications Agencies (in the form of senior account teams) and their clients (as represented by the Marketing or Brand Managers). The interview guide to be applied in the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams will firstly be addressed. The interview guide to be employed in the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers, as well as key members of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies, will be discussed thereafter.

4.9.1 The Interview Guide to the Exploratory Focus Groups

Aaker et al. (1998:191), Proctor (1997:155), Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) point out that the moderator purposefully plays a more passive role in a focus group. The aim is to ensure that respondents are given the freedom to explore, to interact with one another and to discover unexpected ideas, through the free-flow of group discussion. New opinions and attitudes produced in the focus group can then, as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-37) reinforce, be applied to enrich research propositions or to develop hypotheses. The purpose of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies is therefore to explore the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact through free flow discussion and to produce fresh opinions, attitudes and motivations in doing so. To this end, a more loosely structured and interactive approach is employed in the design of the interview guide to the exploratory focus groups, as Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) propose.

The stages involved in the focus group, as defined by Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) and discussed in 4.7.1 of this Chapter, also played a guiding role in the design of the focus group interview guide. To establish a rapport with and between respondents and to ensure clarity of the purpose of the discussion, Templeton, quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) suggests that a concept supportive of the research topic is introduced. For these reasons the focus group discussions with senior account teams will launch with a brief description of the alternative point of brand contact, as derived from the secondary literature study. This description will not be presented as a fait accomplie, but rather as a first and critical point of discussion, to ensure further exploration of the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact.

The description of the alternative point of brand contact will be introduced by reaffirming the brand contact concept. Considering that senior account teams within Integrated Communications Agencies are involved in this research study, this strategic approach should be a commonly held strategic orientation. The alternative brand contact will then be described applying a conversational style, to create a comfortable discussion platform. The description of the alternative point of brand contact will however not allude to any of the defined research propositions to be explored in the primary research study. Research objectivity will therefore not be compromised with and through this introductory step to the focus groups. The description of the alternative point of brand contact to be presented to senior account teams, is as follows:

Brands communicate through a myriad of contacts with consumers. This discussion will focus on one of the areas of contact, namely planned marketing communications point of contact.

The alternative brand contact is planned and implemented in context of the brand communications or marketing communications strategy. An alternative brand contact is presented as a point of contact, in and/or

beyond traditional media that will be experienced by the consumer as unexpected and unconventional.

As reasoned, the above description of the alternative brand contact is introduced as a starting point to the focus groups, to establish a rapport with respondents, to ensure clarity in the aim and direction of the discussion and to initiate and stimulate a free-flow and interactive discussion. The description will be presented verbally and in a typed format to respondents and will furthermore be supported with examples of alternative points of brand contact drawn from Chapter Three of this study (Refer to Appendix B for the examples presented to respondents). The free-flow focus group discussion will then be supported and directed with the following single open-ended question:

How would you define the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact?

This open-ended question addresses the central research proposition and the primary objective of the research study in broad terms. The central research proposition as stated in 4.2 of this Chapter, suggests that the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded brand positioning.

Tull and Hawkins (1993:319) elaborate that the focus group moderator must however provoke intense discussion in areas relevant to the research objective/s. The responses that are delivered in the free-flow discussion that are relevant to the stated central and also the integral research propositions, will therefore be probed. The interview guide to the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams will consequently contain the central and integral research proposition statements as presented in 4.2 and 4.2.1 of this Chapter. The interview guide will then serve as a trigger for the moderator to apply probing in areas relevant to the objectives of the research study.

Kinnear and Taylor (1996:308) furthermore and importantly, reinforce that the value of the focus group and the free-flow of group discussion, essentially lie in the potential to discover the unexpected. To leverage the full potential of the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams, the interview guide will also prompt the moderator to recognise and probe responses that present newly identified dimensions of the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact. As Tull and Hawkins (1993:450) and Nasar-McMillan and Borders (2002:1) confirm, focus groups are ultimately employed to produce greater range of thought, ideas and experiences.

Finally, Tull and Hawkins (1993:449) propose that the moderator, conclude focus group sessions with a summary of group responses, to determine the extent to which agreement exists within the group. The interview guide is therefore concluded with a final prompt to the moderator in this regard. A copy of the interview guide to the exploratory focus groups is attached as Appendix C.

4.9.2 The Interview Guide to the Semi-structured Depth Interviews

To fully and objectively research the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, the opinions and attitudes of both clients and key members of senior account teams toward the defined central and integral research propositions, must be explored. A single interview guide is designed, as a current working format, to guide the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and key members (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors), of the senior account teams.

The interview guide with open-ended questions, as will next be presented, delivers a working format because it will be revisited, as motivated in 4.8 of this chapter, at later points in this study. This measure will firstly be employed to accommodate the enriched research propositions developed in response to

key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The interview guide will therefore firstly be revisited when focus group data analysis has been conducted, valuable results have been presented and the central and integral research propositions have been enriched. The revisited interview guide will then specifically be applied in the semi-structured depth interviews with the Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams involved in the focus groups.

As further explained in the design of the data collection model, in 4.8 of this chapter, the semi-structured depth interviews with key account team members will be conducted in completion to data collection procedures. The depth interviews with senior account team members will therefore also purposefully encompass key insights gained from the semi-structured depth interviews conducted with Marketing or Brand Managers. The interview guide will therefore be revisited once more in preparation of the semi-structured depth interviews with senior account team members, as valuable insights from the depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers is integrated into its design.

Aaker et al. (1998:189) and Dane (1990:129) are of the opinion that the semi-structured depth interview is particularly appropriate when interviewing professional 'thought leaders' and argue that a quid pro quo such as a summary can be employed to gain co-operation, direct and manage the interview. The semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key members of the senior account teams will therefore also launch with the literature description and examples of the alternative point of brand contact, as presented in 4.9.1 of this Chapter. Although key members of the senior account teams will have been exposed to this description in the exploratory focus groups, it will be restated and discussed briefly to refresh and confirm the purpose of the individual depth interview.

The process of exploring the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact, as initiated by the description and examples

of the alternative point of brand contact, is then supported with an Interview Guide that consists of a series of open-ended questions. As a semi-structured interview technique is employed, questions may be rephrased to ensure understanding. Probing is also encouraged where and when elaboration on or amplification of responses is required.

The following open-ended questions have been developed, to support and follow the introductory description and discussion of the alternative point of brand contact. The open-ended questions essentially address the central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting research objectives as presented and discussed in 4.2.1 and 4.3, of this Chapter.

Question One

Do you personally believe that the alternative brand contact has a role to play in modern brand communications planning?

This question addresses the primary reason why the research discussion is taking place. The question embraces a key construct in the title and central research proposition of this study, namely the perceived role of the alternative point of brand contact. Given the natural flow of conversation, the question will most probably verbalise what respondents are already instinctively contemplating. It therefore also ensures that exploration deepens whilst the discussion comfort zone is being established.

Immediate responses to this open question will in all probability be positive (yes, the alternative point of brand contact has a role to play). Two probing questions will therefore be applied. The first being, ***what is its role?*** and the second being, ***why is (this) important ?*** These prompts are vital for two reasons. Firstly, because the alternative brand contact is either going to be perceived as a potential means to break through commercial clutter to create impact, to be noticed, to achieve awareness and build brand knowledge, or not. Secondly, responses will confirm or elaborate on the two interrelated

motivating factors for alternative contact planning namely, clients' need for innovative brand contact solutions that will create impact in an increasingly competitive, fragmented and cluttered environment in which consumers are erecting more intensive selective awareness and attention barriers.

Respondents may furthermore introduce other motivating factors for pursuing alternative brand contact planning that have not been identified through the literature study.

Question Two

Some argue that the mindset or orientation of the agency, the account team and the client has a vital influence on alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion on the matter?

This open-ended question addresses the first supporting research objective identified in 4.3 of this Chapter. The dual aim of the open question is to explore to what extent mindset is perceived to be a critical variable and to investigate the perceived type of mindset that is required in the planning of alternative points of brand contact. Responses to this question will, if necessary, be probed with the question – ***What type of mindset is needed to undertake alternative brand contact planning?***

The open-ended question and prompt are purposefully vague to assess objectively the degree to which outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic thinking naturally emerge as key requisites to alternative brand contact planning. The researcher does not expect these concepts to surface as defined, but rather that the notion and intent of the concepts will emerge in respondents' own language and terms. The researcher also estimates that respondents will confirm and/or elaborate on the identified barriers to alternative brand contact planning, as a means to introduce and motivate their opinions on the mindset required in the planning of alternative points of brand contact.

Should the discussion, centred around Question Two, fail to fully engage any one of the concepts (outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral or creative strategic thinking) identified as key requisites in the mindset toward alternative brand contact planning, a relevant open-ended question will be tailed on. The following open-ended questions will therefore be employed as deemed necessary:

- ***There is an argument that it is necessary to look at points of brand contact from the consumer's point of view, in order to plan an alternative brand contact. What is your thinking?***

The need for an outside-in approach to alternative brand contact planning will thus be established. The literature study reveals that it is the nature of contact with the consumer that establishes the alternative appeal of the brand contact. A point of contact that is not experienced as unconventional and unexpected by the consumer can not be defined as alternative.

- ***Some argue that a zero-based, function-neutral or clean-slate strategic mindset is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion on this?***

The extent to which a zero-based strategic mindset and approach is required in the planning of alternative points of brand contact will thus be revealed. The literature study indicates that alternative brand contact planning relies on a function neutral or clean-slate frame of mind, based on current brand and marketplace conditions. The planning of alternative points of brand contact must be based on the consumer's experience of the brand contact environment. Traditional, historical or preconceived brand contact ideas will in all probability present a barrier to the process of alternative brand contact planning.

• *An argument exists that media-neutral thinking is a requisite to alternative brand contact planning. What is your opinion?*

Although closely related to the previous question, this open-ended question will specifically reveal respondents' opinions and attitudes on whether media-biased strategic planning constrains alternative brand contact planning. The constraint of a media-commission bound remuneration approach, is most likely to surface in responses to this question. Likewise the perceived need for a fee and/or performance-based planning and remuneration environment, to effectively plan and implement alternative points of brand contact, is likely to emerge.

• *Some argue that alternative points of brand contact can only be produced in a planning environment that demonstrates creative strategic thinking. What is your opinion?*

Respondents' understanding of the concept of and perceived need for creative strategic thinking in the development of unconventional and unexpected points of brand contact will be revealed. Requisites and barriers to applying creative strategic thinking, for example, the need for a cross-functional account team environment and the constraints created by measurement or media-bound planning systems and decision-making, may also emerge in responses to this question.

Question Three

To create impact, a point of brand contact must break through clutter to gain consumers' attention, to build brand awareness and knowledge. Do you believe the alternative brand contact can attain this goal? If so, what qualities must it exhibit?

This open-ended question addresses respondents' perceptions of the concept of impact in totality and explores their opinions and attitudes toward the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact therein. Question Three in

the Interview Guide thus embraces the following critical alternative brand contact requisites or integral research propositions as identified and discussed in 4.2.1 and 4.3 of this Chapter:

- To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must firstly be novel to be noticed.
- To attain impact, the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning.
- To create meaningful impact, the alternative brand contact must in message content and form communicate a relevant, distinctive and single-minded positioning of the brand.
- To achieve impact, the alternative brand contact must be relevant to the consumer, in terms of lifestyle patterns, interests and state-of-mind (aperture).

Although the above stated open-ended question draws on the assumption that previous questions, in particular Question One, will have established a link between the unconventional and unexpected point of contact and its role in breaking through clutter to create impact, it does not depend on it. Should respondents disagree with the approach, the question presents sufficient leeway to argue the alternative point of brand contact's inability to create meaningful impact.

The open-ended question is purposefully designed to explore the nature and role of the alternative point of contact in its entirety, in context of impact as a holistic concept. The nature and discussion flow of the semi-structured depth interviews will be inhibited, become too fragmented and too researcher lead (even biased), should each of the above alternative brand contact requisites or integral research propositions be addressed individually or separately in relation to the concept of impact. The depth interviews may furthermore then also fail at introducing and pursuing new ideas or concepts, which is a primary motivating factor for employing a qualitative exploratory research design in this study.

This open-ended question broadly addresses the alternative point of brand contact, in relation to impact, to create the opportunity for the above mentioned alternative brand contact requisites and further real world measures that have not been identified in secondary literature sources to surface, to be explored and defined. However, should any one of the stated requisites not emerge in discussion, the following prompts will be applied as deemed necessary and appropriate:

- ***Is there any particular quality that the alternative point of brand contact must exhibit to break through clutter, to create impact, to be noticed?***

Responses to this question will establish whether the alternative brand contact must firstly be perceived as novel and original, as unconventional and unexpected, to succeed in breaking through commercial clutter barriers, to be noticed and gain consumers' attention.

- ***Some argue that the alternative brand contact must be expressive of meaning to attain impact. What is your opinion?***

Respondents' will in all probability be in agreement, as the impact of brand communications is generally perceived to depend on the ability to communicate effectively, to create brand awareness and build brand knowledge. The intent of this open question is thus rather to probe respondents opinions on the issue and specifically in relation to the alternative point of brand contact. Firstly, to establish ***what meaning or understanding the alternative point of contact must ultimately convey?*** Responses will reveal whether the meaning that is conveyed by the alternative brand contact, must ultimately instil and contribute to the building of a relevant, distinctive and single-minded brand identity. Greater clarity as to the role of the alternative point of brand contact in the integrated brand contact strategy will thus be obtained. Secondly, respondents will be probed to ascertain ***how the alternative brand contact should express (this) meaning to create impact.*** The

literature study establishes that the meaning created through both the form of alternative contact and the message that is conveyed, must reflect a relevant, distinctive and single-minded understanding of the brand's positioning in order to create meaningful impact. Responses will therefore indicate whether both the message content and form of the alternative brand contact is important in expressing brand meaning and whether other real world variables need to also be explored in this regard.

- ***Do you believe that the nature or the identity of the target audience will influence the ability of the alternative point of brand contact to achieve impact?***

The open-ended question raises the possible influence of consumer or target audience relevance on the impact of the alternative point of brand contact. The question purposefully does not point at the influence of any variables (lifestyle patterns and interests and state-of-mind or aperture) in particular. It therefore stimulates respondents to explore the issue at hand and to consider target audience variables that they deem to have an influence on the impact of the alternative brand contact. The variables that have been identified as important constructs in achieving target audience relevance and ultimately alternative brand contact impact will thus have an opportunity to emerge naturally. So doing, possible new concepts that have not been identified and explored in the literature study may also arise in discussion.

Question Four

Considering that the alternative brand contact is defined by its unexpected and unconventional appeal, can you foresee any challenges in it maintaining its status?

The final question in the interview guide addresses the alternative point of brand contact's ability to maintain its unconventional and unexpected appeal. Responses to this question will reveal whether there is a perceived concern with the maintenance of the alternative point of brand contact, whether respondents agree that the impact value of the alternative brand contact will diminish as it grows stale, as it is no longer perceived as unconventional and unexpected. To explore this issue and to acquire insightful data, respondents will be probed with the following open-ended question: ***how does one ensure that an alternative point of brand contact maintains an unexpected and unconventional appeal?*** Respondents may in discussion confirm that novel alternative points of brand contact will have to be developed continuously or that sustainable alternative brand contacts that can be improved upon be employed. The discussion may also produce new thoughts and ideas as to how impact through the unconventional and unexpected appeal of the alternative brand contact can be assured over time.

The proposed interview guide (working format) to the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key members of senior account teams, consists of four key open-ended questions with ranges of identified prompts, that will be applied as required. The design of the interview guide presents a semi-structured interview approach, conducive to the qualitative exploratory research orientation of this study. The aim is to produce conversations with purpose, as Lindlof quoted in Deacon et al. (1999:65) suggests. The challenge is to address the defined central and integral research propositions whilst stimulating freedom of thought, to produce a richness of data on the research issues at hand but also to uncover and explore real world concepts that have not emerged in the literature study.

In completion to this chapter and with a view to conducting the exploratory focus groups and semi-structured depth interviews, the sampling procedures to be employed in this research study, will be introduced, discussed and motivated.

4.10 The Sampling Procedure

Cooper and Schindler (1998:215) explain that the basic premise of sampling is that by selecting some of the elements in a population (universe), conclusions can be drawn about the population at large. In context of research and sampling procedures, a population element refers to the subject on which measurement is taken whereas the concept population refers to the total collection of elements about which inferences are to be drawn.

Lohr (1999:3) furthermore reasons that a perfect sample will be a scaled-down version of the population and will thus mirror every characteristic of the whole population. Although a perfect sample seldom exists for complex populations, the quality of a sample design is none the less based on how effectively it represents the characteristics of the population it purports to represent. Dillon et al. (1993:214) thus argue that a sampling procedure must enable the researcher to make informed decisions in the absence of perfect knowledge. The data gathered from a sample must ultimately reflect the population that is of interest to the researcher, as accurately as possible. A valid sample is therefore regarded as one that produces the characteristics of interest in the population as closely as possible.

According to McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:219) a set of key decisions must be made in order to secure a valid sample. These decisions essentially pertain to the relevance of the population and the parameters of interest, the sample type and the sample size. Malhotra (1996:360) and Proctor (1997:71) elaborate that sampling thus consists of a series of key steps, namely:

- The development of a definition of the target population.
- The development of a sampling frame.
- The selection of a sample design.
- Determination of the sample size and
- Selection of appropriate sample members.

The decision areas and key steps will next be discussed and applied in context of this study.

4.10.1 The Population of Interest

McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) point out that there are no specific rules to follow in defining the population of interest. The researcher is required rather, to apply sound logic and judgement. The basic premise is to specify the characteristics of the population elements from which information must be obtained, to meet the research objective/s.

McDaniel and Gates (1996:449), Cooper and Schindler (1998:220) and Sudman and Blair (1998:334) consequently suggest that clear population parameters must be introduced to assist the researcher in defining the population of interest, as directed by the research objectives. Population parameters essentially are summary descriptors of variables of interest in the population. Important or particular sub-groups of interest to the researcher may for example exist within the population. Population units and boundaries are thus defined in relation to the focus of the study and the area or phenomena of interest. Cooper and Schindler (1998:215) and Malhotra (1996:360) conclude that once the population of interest has been defined, it is referred to as a target population. The target population then exists as Malhotra (1996:361) explains, of elements or sampling units, that possess the information that is sought to meet research objectives.

Research parameters, in the form of barriers to alternative brand contact planning, were introduced, discussed and applied in the process of setting clear research objectives to this study (4.3). Consequently, the population of interest to this study was also revealed. Aaker et al. (1998:375) in confirmation state that if the research objectives of a study are well thought out, the target population definition will be clear. The primary objective of this study is to determine:

If the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact is perceived by South African Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients to be to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand?

The population and two target sub groups of interest to this study are thus Integrated Communication Agencies in South Africa and their clients. Furthermore, and as is evident in the research focus, design and application of data collection methods to this study (4.8), specific variables introduce more finite profiles of the target sub groups of interest. Firstly, the alternative brand contact is the product of creative strategic thinking fostered within the integrated account team. To ensure that rich and revealing data is produced in the focus groups, senior account teams with range and depth of insight and experience will be interviewed. Secondly, the primary focus of this study is not the process of integrated brand contact planning but rather the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact therein. The semi-structured depth interviews will therefore involve the Marketing or Brand Manager responsible for briefing and managing the senior account team and not the Brand Contact Task Team as a whole.

The nature, role and context of the alternative brand contact must be reflected in both the data collection and sample design of the primary research study. The population or universe of marketing and communication professionals, is consequently narrowed down by reasoned research parameters to the following two defined target population groups of interest to this study:

- Senior account teams within Integrated Communications Agencies and
- Marketing/Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies.

4.10.2 Sample Frame, Size and Method

Sample frame, size and method presented a particular challenge to this study. The researcher established that this is greatly because the primary objective of the study is to explore the nature and role of the alternative point of brand contact as perceived by a South African target population of *Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients*. The challenge manifested as follows and will be addressed in context of the frame, size and method of sampling to this study.

a) Sample Frame

The data collection design of this study indicates that firstly, exploratory focus groups will be conducted with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The exploratory focus groups will be followed with semi-structured depth interviews with the Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the interviewed senior account teams and then also with key members of the senior account teams.

Given the data collection process to this study, it is evident that a frame is needed from which a sample of Integrated Communications Agencies can be drawn to conduct focus groups with their senior account teams. The sample frame of Marketing or Brand Managers on the other hand will naturally evolve as represented by the clients of the sampled senior account teams. The sample of key members of the senior account teams will in turn emerge as they are identified in the focus group sessions.

Malhotra (1996:361) and McDaniel and Gates (1996:452) explain that a sampling frame is a list of the population elements from which a sample is selected. A sampling frame is thus a list or system that identifies eligible sampling elements or units. Sudman and Blair (1998:338) are of the opinion that lists are generally the preferred sampling frame employed and that the quality of lists that already exist, although subject to error, are normally as

good or better than lists developed from a zero base for the purposes of research. The use of an existing list is also more time and cost efficient than generating a new list.

Sudman and Blair (1998:340) and Aaker et al. (1998:377- 378) however elaborate that lists do often pose research problems. Firstly, omission can occur as some population members are omitted from a list. Secondly, listed elements may not be members of the target population and are thus ineligible for inclusion in a sample. Thirdly, population members may be duplicated on a list and fourthly, clustering may exist as two or more population members correspond to a list. Fifthly, lists may simply not be current.

A close investigation of current available lists of the members of the Advertising and Communications Industry in South Africa revealed that the second problem namely, ineligibility does in fact pose a framing problem to this research study. This study requires that the sample frame and sampling process be based on a complete and correct target population frame of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa. Koekemoer and de Klerk from the Association for Communication and Advertising (ACA) and Brewer from the Brewers List are fully acquainted with databases of the communications and advertising industries in South Africa and were interviewed in 2002, in this regard. The individuals established that no such frame exists. The agencies that have positioned themselves as Integrated Communications Agencies exist in and amongst the current frames or databases of 680+ Advertising or Communication Agencies in South Africa. However, according to Koekemoer, the most representative, frequently updated and thus complete sampling list or frame of the South African Advertising and Communications Industry, is the Brewers List. Established in 1989, Brewers maintains three major databases of the South African communications industry. The three databases present a media directory, information on advertising agencies and information on companies active in the South African market place.

Sudman and Blair (1998:343) reason that the problem of ineligibility in lists is straightforward. Ineligible elements should not be selected. They are not in the target population and should therefore not be in the sample. With reference to this study, the traditional advertising agencies are not in the target population of the study and should not be selected. The challenge is thus to address the eligibility or ineligibility of sampling units in a recommended frame such as the Brewers List.

Sudman and Blair (1998:343) reason that the problem of ineligibility is dealt with in one of two ways. Firstly, the entire list can be screened to delete all ineligible. Such a step is however not always practical as the ineligible factor may not be visible in the list. This is certainly the case with existing lists of Advertising or Communication Agencies in South Africa. As Koekemoer and Brewer confirm, the information contained in these lists are of a demographic and geographic nature and does not enable one to differentiate between those agencies that are positioned as Integrated Communication Agencies and those that are not.

The second approach to dealing with the problem of ineligibility is more practical and entails that selected elements from an appropriate frame are screened for eligibility after sampling, at which point the ineligible are dropped from the frame. Sudman and Blair (1998:343) reason that the implication then is that the desired sample size must be adjusted to allow for shrinkage. The adjustment of sample size as described by Sudman and Blair (1998:343-344) is managed as follows: The desired sample size is determined (n) and the percentage of eligible elements' (e) is estimated. On the principle of n/e an adjusted sample size is then calculated and delivered. Sudman and Blair (1998:344) further explain that the percentage of eligible elements is obtained from prior experience or by studying a small sample size. No insight could however be gained from literature research with regard the percentage of Integrated Communications Agencies (eligible elements), in South Africa. Consequently, prominent and independent industry experts who track and report on issues and trends in the South African advertising industry were consulted in 2002, in this regard. Based on the Delphi Forecasting

Method, as described by Aaker et al. (1998:745) and Sudman and Blair (1998:78), the industry experts were firstly approached to deliver an independent judgement on the percentage of Integrated Communication Agencies in South Africa.

The experts who were consulted are:

Tony Koenderman – Editor of the Tony Koenderman AdReview and Associate Editor of Finance Week,

Wilma de Bruyn – Freelance writer for Sake Beeld (the business section to the Afrikaans newspaper Beeld),

John Farquhar – Editor-in-Chief of Advantage (a leading industry publication),

Chris Moerdyk – Media and marketing commentator and founder of Marketing Web,

Gordon Cook – Managing Director of Vega. The Brand Communications School and

Nina de Klerk – Executive Director of the ACA (Association for Communication and Advertising).

The immediate responses of the experts were unsettling and consequently greatly influenced the sampling orientation of this study. Immediate doubt and scepticism was expressed as to the objectivity of screening advertising agencies for integration or placing an estimated percentage on the agencies in South Africa that may be functioning as Integrated Communication Agencies. Koenderman, for example, argued that given the international norm of above- versus below-the-line expenditure (45:55), it is evident that South African advertising agencies are still oriented toward classical above-the-line advertising expenditure. Few agencies in Koenderman's opinion demonstrate a balanced and therefore a well integrated communications expenditure profile. Koenderman based his assessment on the Financial Mail Adfocus 2002 survey of major league agency rankings by income from fees, commission and mark-ups (Appendix D).

The primary and collective concern however was, that given the growing demand for integrated brand communications planning and delivery, all advertising agencies will inadvertently profess themselves to be operating as Integrated Communications Agencies. Koenderman, Moerdyk, Cook and de Bruyn for example, stated in unison that a screening exercise would deliver superficial results, as every agency would claim to be integrated. Farquhar confirmed this by stating that “agencies pay lip service to integration”. These observations resulted in a critical assessment of the research objectivity in approaching agencies for screening purposes. Drawing a sample of agencies, as Sudman and Blair (1998:334) propose, to determine eligibility will in all probability, based on expert opinion, result in an inaccurate and unreliable frame.

Of significance is that the experts did identify agencies whom they personally believe to be delivering or working towards delivering integrated brand communication solutions. Furthermore, in the independent and unbiased conversations with the industry experts, clear overlap in the identification of some Integrated Communication Agencies occurred.

As a result, sample framing, size and method possibilities to this study were scrutinised. The primary research study is a qualitative, exploratory study. As previously discussed and motivated (4.4.1), in exploratory research information is acquired from insightful sources with experience in the field of the study rather than from a cross-section of the population. McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) also observe that smaller samples are consequently generated more informally and organically, as opposed to the larger sample sizes that are generated, based on statistical precision, in quantitative research. It is the value of information that is obtained from a carefully chosen sample, as Dillon et al. (1993:42-43) conclude, that is of importance in qualitative and then also, exploratory research.

The nature and purpose of qualitative exploratory research and the insightful opinions of the independent industry experts with regard the integrated status of advertising agencies in South Africa, directed research decision-making in

developing an appropriate sampling design. To ensure clarity in research purpose and direction, sample size will however firstly be addressed, whereupon a sampling method will be introduced in response to insights gained from the industry experts.

b) Sample Size

The sample design to be implemented in this study must reflect the nature and purpose of the primary research study. Exploratory focus groups will be employed to gain insight into the attitudes, opinions and motivations of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. Semi-structured depth interviews are to be conducted with clients (Marketing/Brand Managers) of the senior account teams and also with the identified thought leaders (Strategic Planners, Media Planners and Creative Directors) within the senior account teams. The number of focus groups and depth interviews needed to deliver accurate and reliable research results is an important point of decision making and will influence the selection of appropriate sampling methods. For this reason sample size will next be discussed and decided, whereupon an appropriate sampling method will be presented and implemented to draw a research sample of Integrated Communications Agencies.

Sudman and Blair (1998:333) reason that the validity of a sample depends on two core constructs. Firstly, a sample must be accurate, or in other words, unbiased. No known or unknown influence must be allowed to create a variation in measure to cause scores to lean in one direction as opposed to another. Secondly, a valid sample must exhibit precision of estimate. Sampling error must therefore be minimised by limiting the possibility that the sample may not reflect the populations' true characteristics. Sampling error is generally controlled by sample size. The reasoning being, that the greater the size of the sample, the less the chance of producing results uncharacteristic of the population as a whole.

Sudman and Blair (1998:333) and Deacon et al. (1999:42-43) however elaborate that the focus on sample size is often misplaced and particularly so when conducting qualitative research. In a qualitative research study it is vital that the right information be gathered from the right people. Sampling bias is consequently viewed as an important factor and is dealt with by clearly defining and framing the population, selecting an appropriate sample design and drawing a valid sample group.

In qualitative research it is far more important that a sample is selected that represents the entire population of interest fairly. Qualitative studies are less concerned with generating an extensive perspective and more so focussed on providing intensive insights into more complex phenomenon. Smaller samples are consequently generated more informally and organically in comparison to the larger sample sizes based on statistical precision, employed in quantitative research. McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) conclude that the premise is that a relatively small but carefully chosen sample can quite accurately reflect the characteristics of the population.

Dillon et al. (1993:231) and Deacon et al. (1999:42-43) thus conclude that where qualitative problem-solving research is undertaken the value of information to be obtained becomes more critical. According to the authors quality of information can not effectively be managed by employing statistical precision. A 'value of information' approach is thus pursued to ensure that an accurate, unbiased sample is delivered. This approach will be investigated and applied because it is decision focussed and particularly relevant to the nature of this study.

The value of information approach is based on the principle that each new unit of information, each depth interview or focus group, provides some marginal improvement (value) in the knowledge about or insight into the topic of study. The marginal value subsequently decreases from unit to unit, because the more is known, the less value is gained from additional units of information. The purpose is not to build up large numbers of similar cases to make broader inferences, but rather to stop gathering information when data

collection fails to reveal new insights. Information gathering is brought to a halt as evidence starts to repeat itself and as a saturation point is reached. In qualitative research samples are deemed to be illustrative of thinking within the target population, rather than strictly and generally representative.

Within context of the value of information approach Dillon et al. (1993:231) propose that non-statistical approaches be considered to set appropriate sample sizes. Sample sizes can accordingly be set to reflect past and current typical practices and/or by asking experts to suggest sample sizes. Setting sample sizes according to past and present practices would involve an investigation of industry norms to then follow suit. Industry experts can furthermore be consulted in which case the research project is described, the expert considers several possible approaches and recommends a sample size.

Deacon et al. (1999:56) furthermore suggest that the size of samples be directed by the ultimate purpose of the research study. Corner (1996:299), in agreement, reasons that larger numbers of focus groups and or depth interviews must be conducted if the research purpose is to explore and describe a broad range of variables. If the purpose, on the other hand, is to engage with a particular issue, with a particular social or professional sample group, less are required.

The value of information approach to sample size determination will be pursued in this study. The purpose of this study is to engage with a particular issue, namely the alternative point of brand contact, with a particular professional sample group, namely senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies and their clients (Marketing and/or Brand Managers). As argued by Corner (1996:299) a smaller sample group is thus required to produce viable research results. Furthermore, to ensure a valid sample size is set, as proposed by Dillon et al. (1993:231), the nature and purpose of this study was described in 2002, to three leading industry professionals active in the field of marketing and advertising research in South Africa. Given current industry norms and the research purpose of this study,

Eric du Plessis - MD of Millward Brown Impact, Heather Kennedy - Manager of the South African Marketing Research Association and Lee Kotze – a specialist in qualitative research and MD of Solution Workshop, proposed that four to six focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies be conducted. In keeping with the value of information approach, the industry specialists elaborated that if by the fourth focus group data collection fails to reveal new insights the data gathering process should be brought to a halt.

As previously established, the frame of Marketing or Brand Managers and the sample of thought leaders within the senior account teams, with whom semi-structured depth interviews are to be conducted, will naturally evolve from the sample of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. Consequently, the following sample sizes were set, in accordance with an assumed number of six focus groups, and presented to the industry professionals for comment and approval:

- Ten semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the senior account teams.
- Fifteen semi-structured depth interviews with key members or thought leaders (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors), within the interviewed senior account teams.

The proposed sample sizes were approved by the industry professionals and commented on by Kotze, as “more than sufficient”. The proposed and approved sample sizes to the exploratory focus groups and the semi-structured depth interviews enabled the researcher to revisit the question of sample frame and to consider an appropriate sampling method. As previously reasoned, the opinions of independent industry experts challenged the objectivity of screening advertising agencies to determine their status as Integrated Communications Agencies. Also, the industry experts independently identified agencies that in their experience and opinion do

present or are working towards delivering integrated brand communications solutions. This insight coupled with the knowledge that a base of six exploratory focus groups need to be conducted to deliver reliable research data, enabled the researcher to evaluate and select a meaningful and appropriate sampling method, as will next be elaborated on.

c) The Sample Method

Two general sampling methods or designs are encountered in drawing a research sample namely, probability and non-probability samples. The decision as to which method to follow is, according to Proctor (1997:76), guided by the acceptability and likelihood of a method to deliver accurate data.

Probability or random samples rely on chance and employ a random process to select population elements for a sample. Every population element has a known, non-zero chance (probability) of selection. As McDaniel and Gates (1996:455) explain, in probability sampling precise selection procedures are followed to ensure that the law of probability is in effect. The aim is as Dillon et al. (1993:221) reason, to deliver projectable data that can be extrapolated to the entire population. In non-probability sampling, on the other hand, elements are not rigorously chosen but rather selected in a purposeful way, primarily by judgement, quota or convenience. Although estimates are then not statistically projectable to the entire population, as Dillon et al. (1993:229) point out, representative data can be produced, depending on the approach and controls used in sample selection.

As previously motivated, qualitative exploratory research involves smaller sample sizes that are as McDaniel and Gates (1996:445) reason, generated more informally and organically. The premise is that a relatively small but carefully chosen sample will deliver information of value and can quite accurately reflect the characteristics of the target population. According to Sudman and Blair (1998:350) probability sampling cannot be relied upon for a

representative sample that is small in size. The statistical law of large numbers suggests that a sample of twenty or more allows reasonable confidence that a probability sample is representative of the target population.

This research study will launch with a sample of six Integrated Communications Agencies. The samples of Marketing and Brand Managers and key account team members will organically grow from the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. It is evident that a non-probability sampling method is appropriate to the nature and purpose of this study.

This study is furthermore challenged by the critical questioning of industry experts who believe that the screening of advertising agencies, to determine their status as Integrated Communication Agencies, will not deliver objective results. Cooper and Schindler (1998:244) specifically reason that non-probability samples are often encountered in exploratory research and particularly when the research objective is to contact certain population elements that are atypical. This is the case in this study and for this reason a non-probability sampling method will be employed to deliver a sample of Integrated Communications Agencies and to overcome the challenge introduced in the framing of the target population. The scope of non-probability sampling methods will next be identified and discussed whereupon an appropriate sampling method to this study will be selected, motivated and applied.

According to Green, Tull and Albaum (1988:327), Dillon et al. (1993:229), Sudman and Blair (1998:348) and Cooper and Schindler (1998:245) non-probability samples essentially entail judgement, convenience, quota and snowball sampling.

- In *judgment sampling* the researcher controls sampling down to the element level and actively employs as Sudman and Blair (1996:469) point out, sound judgmental selection criterion and expertise regarding the representativeness of the elements. Purposeful nonrandomness is applied as certain sub-

segments of the population are systematically excluded or over represented. Green et al. (1988:327) and Sudman and Blair (1998:348) reason that the key assumption is that with expert judgment and an appropriate strategy, elements can be chosen and a sample developed that is suitable to the research objectives. According to Cooper and Schindler (1998:245) judgment sampling is particularly appropriate in the early stages of exploratory research.

- *Convenience sampling* involves no sample design. The most accessible or easily available population members, that are reasonable representative, are involved as a sample in the study. Volunteer sampling is often employed in this context. Sudman and Blair (1998:349) reason that the logic behind a convenience sample is that it is good enough for research purposes.

- *Quota sampling* is, according to Cooper and Schindler (1998:245), also purposive and is specifically used to improve representativeness. Quota sampling involves the meeting of quotas for the number of observations to be gathered in identified population groups. This entails that the relevant strata to the study are specified, their sizes are estimated and observations are gathered to meet the quotas in proportion of the identified strata. Quota samples are commonly selected in such a way that demographic characteristics of interest are represented in the sample in the same proportions as they are encountered in the population.

- *Snowball samples* (also known as multiplicity sampling), involve the selection of additional respondents on the grounds of referrals from original respondents whom may or may not be selected through probability methods. Green et al. (1988:329) explain that as referrals are then obtained from referrals, snowballing occurs. This method is applied in the case of low incidence or rare populations where elements are difficult to source and to contact.

The non-probability sampling method that is ideally suited to the nature, purpose and constraints of this study is purposive judgment sampling. The aim is to purposefully exclude the traditional advertising agency and to over represent the Integrated Communications Agency. The method is also appropriate to the early stages of exploratory research, as is the case with the primary research study. Of greater significance is that the independent industry experts whom were consulted in this study are sceptical as to the objectivity of screening and framing a target population of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa. The experts did however deliver judgment as to the agencies that do or are in their experience and opinion, working towards delivering integrated brand communications solutions, as mentioned in 4.5.2 (a) of this Chapter.

Green et al. (1988:327) and Sudman and Blair (1998:348) reason that with expert judgment and an appropriate strategy, a sample that is appropriate to the research objectives can be developed. Aaker et al. (1998:390) furthermore state that if the sample size is under ten, as is the case in this study, a judgment sample “usually will be more reliable and representative than a probability sample”. On this premise a sample of Integrated Communications Agencies will next be drawn.

4.10.3 Drawing the Sample

The various independent industry experts, as previously explained in 4.10.2 (a) of this chapter, identified the agencies that they experience to be or believe to be, offering or working towards delivering integrated brand communications solutions. Clear overlap is evident in the independent judgement of agencies and given the need to develop a sample of six Integrated Communications Agencies, the following strategy is implemented.

The agencies identified by the individual industry experts are tabled (Table 1). The agencies that received more than one mention are then isolated and ranked from the most received mentions to the least received mentions (Table

2). The six Integrated Communications Agencies that received the most mentions represent the proposed sample of agencies that exploratory focus groups will be conducted with (Table 2).

Table 1: Identified Integrated Communications Agencies

Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5	Respondent 6
TBWA Hunt Lascaris	FCB	TBWA Hunt Lascaris	FCB	The Jupiter Drawing Room	Interbrand Sampson
FCB	TBWA Hunt Lascaris	The Jupiter Drawing Room	TBWA Hunt Lascaris	Net#work BBDO	Enterprise
Net#work BBDO		Admakers	Net#work BBDO	FCB	O2 Communications
The Jupiter Drawing Room		Lowe Bull Calvert Pace	Sonnenberg Murphy Leo Burnett	Ogilvy& Mather RSTM	Ogilvy & Mather RSTM
Bester Burke D'Arcy		Net#work BBDO	Berry Bush BBDO	Gendel Interactive	King James
King James		FCB	Ogilvy&Mather RSTM	Klatzko & Waldron	J. Walter Thompson Co
				Sharrer/Fusion Advertising	FCB
				08 Seconds Branding & Design	TBWA Hunt Lascaris
				Inroads	The Jupiter Drawing Room
				Saatchi&Saatchi	
				Grey Worldwide	

Table 2: The Sample of Integrated Communications Agencies in rank order

1. FCB (6 mentions)
2. TBWA Hunt Lascaris (5 mentions)
3. Net#work BBDO (4 mentions)
4. The Jupiter Drawing Room (4 mentions)
5. Ogilvy&Mather RSTM (3 mentions)
6. King James (2 mentions)

In completion of the Delphi Approach to Forecasting, as described by Aaker et al. (1998:745) and Sudman and Blair (1998:78), the results of the assessment of expert opinion or judgement were presented to the six interviewed industry experts. The experts thus had the opportunity to compare their own previous judgements with those of others and to respond to the final selection of Integrated Communications Agencies.

All of the industry experts approved of the proposed sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. However, a valuable comment was delivered by one of the industry experts with reference to the second and third phases of research that focus on the clients of and the key players within the senior account teams within the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies.

The industry expert proposed that the phases of semi-structured depth interviews with clients and key players in the senior account teams include King James as the only small agency in the sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. According to the industry expert the smaller agencies in industry tend to operate in a more integrated fashion purely because of their size and need to satisfy client demand in order to generate revenue. This observation incidentally also surfaced in initial discussions with two other industry experts who argued that small agencies tend to deliver more integrated brand communication solutions purely “because they have to satisfy client needs in order to stay in business”.

Based on the observations of three of the industry experts the phases of semi-structured depth interviews with clients (Marketing or Brand Managers) and key players within the senior account teams will be applied as follows:

Two clients and three key players (Strategic Planner, Media Planner and Creative Director) will be interviewed from each of the top four ranked agencies, all of whom are considered as large to medium sized agencies, to then also include King James, as a small agency. Thus 10 clients will be interviewed in the second phase of research and 15 key players (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors) will be interviewed in the third phase of research.

The Managing Directors of the identified six Integrated Communications Agencies will be contacted telephonically to discuss and gain their co-operation with regard the purpose and intent of the research study and to identify and make available their senior account teams for exploratory focus group research.

As previously reasoned, the frame of Marketing or Brand Managers will organically evolve from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams. The senior account teams will in other words be requested to identify two key clients. The sample of thought leaders or key members in the senior account teams will emerge as they are identified in the exploratory focus groups.

4.11 Conclusion

The aim of this Chapter is to present a sound research methodology that will result in a meaningful research process and will ultimately produce valuable conclusions and recommendations.

The primary research study is based on a central suggestion or proposition, derived from an extensive secondary literature study. The central proposition to the primary research study is that *the unconventional and unexpected point of planned brand contact can break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce a single-minded positioning of the brand*. The literature study furthermore reveals that the ability of the alternative brand contact to achieve the above, depends on a set of requisites. These requisites form the integral propositions to the primary research study.

The research problem is presented in that it remains to be seen whether South African marketing and communication professionals perceive the unconventional and unexpected point of brand contact to break through commercial clutter barriers to impact on consumers and communicate or reinforce the single-minded positioning of the brand. The primary and supporting objectives to the primary research study are therefore closely aligned to the central and integral research propositions, to ensure clarity and focus in the research study.

It is the Integrated Communications Agency that is the focus of this research study. The Integrated Communications Agency functions as a strategic partner to its clients to present strategic insight on all levels of contact integration. Unlike its traditional counterparts, the Integrated Communications Agency pursues a holistic, outside-in, zero-based and media-neutral brand contact planning approach and with the cross-functional integration of skills and expertise into account teams, is best suited to undertake creative strategic planning in developing unconventional and unexpected contact solutions. The population of this study is consequently narrowed down from

marketing and communication professionals, to a target population of Integrated Communication Agencies and their clients.

It is not assumed that all Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa are structured into cross-functional account teams that demonstrate outside-in, zero-based, media-neutral and creative strategic planning in the development of integrated brand communication strategies. It is however assumed that the population of Integrated Communications Agencies as they stand, will present a planning mindset that is more conducive to researching the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact, than that of their traditional counterparts. Equally so, it is assumed that the clients of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa, are in need of communication partners that can develop integrated and unconventional brand communication solutions.

The investigation of literature sources on research design indicates that the objectives of this study will best be achieved through a qualitative exploratory research study. Firstly, because the research area is new and important variables to the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact may not be known and secondly, because as Cooper and Schindler (1998:135) confirm, only a fraction of industry knowledge in a particular field, is put into writing. This study is furthermore qualitative in nature because depth attitudes, opinions and motivations need to be explored in order to gain insight into the perceived nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact. Consequently, an appropriate method of data source selection is encountered in the self-report data method and particularly in the form of depth interviews and focus groups.

The reason for employing both data source methods is based on the nature of integrated brand contact planning and the nature and role of the alternative brand contact within the planned brand contact strategy. Integrated brand contact planning involves both the client's Brand Contact Task Team and the account team within the Integrated Communications Agency. To gain an objective and balanced view on the identified research propositions and

related research objectives, both role players must be involved in the primary research study.

However, the focus of this study is not on the concept and process of integrated brand contact planning but rather on the nature, role and planning of the alternative point of brand contact therein. The target profile of clients is thus narrowed down to focus on the Marketing or Brand Manager responsible for briefing and managing the account team in the Integrated Communications Agency. Also, to ensure rich and revealing data is produced, the target profile of account teams is narrowed down to the senior account teams, the teams with range and depth in experience, in Integrated Communication Agencies.

Exploratory focus groups will firstly be conducted with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The focus group is used to study a concept in context of group dynamics. The alternative point of brand contact in turn relies on the dynamics of the integrated account team as a cross-functional unit. The exploratory focus group is typically used in exploratory research and its aim as Aaker et al. (1998:192) reinforce, is to explore a new concept through free discussion.

The interview guide to the exploratory focus groups is purposefully designed to stimulate free discussion. The focus group discussions will be initiated through a description and examples of the alternative brand contact, as derived from the literature study and as recommended by Templeton quoted in Tull and Hawkins (1993:449). The description of the alternative brand contact will be supported with a single open-ended question namely, *How would you define the nature, role and planning of the alternative brand contact?* Probing will be employed to ensure that the research topic is fully explored, observations that are relevant to the central and integral research propositions are pursued and new or fresh insights are investigated. New attitudes and opinions that emerge in the focus group sessions will then, as Cooper and Schindler (1998:134-137) propose, be applied to enrich the stated central and integral research propositions.

The exploratory focus groups with senior account teams will be followed with two layers of depth interviews. The first with a sample of Marketing or Brand Managers responsible for briefing and managing the interviewed senior account teams and the second with key members or thought leaders (Strategic Planners, Media Planners, Creative Directors), within the interviewed senior account teams. The latter two samples will organically evolve from the sample of senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies. The depth interview technique selected for the interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers and key senior account team members, is the semi-structured depth interview. This method promotes an active and open-ended dialogue yet allows the researcher to retain control over the interview by referring to an interview guide. Respondents are thus able to articulate their thoughts and opinions and complex and sensitive issues can effectively be explored.

The interview guide to the semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers launches with the same description and examples of the alternative brand contact, as employed in the exploratory focus group research. The guide then also contains a set of four open-ended questions with relevant probing questions that address the central and integral research propositions and related primary and supporting research objectives. It must be noted that the interview guide, as presented in 4.9.2 of this Chapter, presents a working format as it will be revisited to address the enriched research propositions developed in response to key insights gained from the exploratory focus groups with senior account teams.

As argued, a second layer of semi-structured depth interviews will be conducted. These interviews will involve the thought leaders or key members of the interviewed senior account teams. The interview guide to the depth interviews with key senior account team members will also reflect and address the insights gained from the depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers.

In completion to this Chapter sampling procedure is discussed. An immediate challenge was encountered in acquiring an appropriate frame of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa. Two clear factors define this challenge. Firstly, no frame of Integrated Communications Agencies in South Africa exists. Also, the problem of ineligibility is encountered in existing lists of advertising agencies in South Africa. The agencies that may be functioning as Integrated Communications Agencies are as Koekemoer, de Klerk and Brewer point out, interspersed in and amongst the available lists of advertising agencies.

Secondly, six independent industry experts in South Africa, who were consulted using the Delphi Forecasting Method to address the above constraints, are of the opinion that no clear estimation can be placed on the percentage of agencies in South Africa that are indeed operating as Integrated Communications Agencies. Of greater significance is that the industry experts believe that the screening of agencies, to ascertain their status as Integrated Communications agencies, will be a subjective and futile exercise. Lip service is paid to the concept of integration and if asked, all agencies as Koenderman, de Bruyn, Farquhar, Cook and Moerdyk argue, will claim to be integrated.

The industry experts did however identify agencies that they believe to be delivering or working towards delivering integrated brand communication solutions. Also, considerable overlap is encountered in the judgement of the individual industry experts. The individual interviews with industry experts consequently resulted in a critical assessment of the sampling procedure to this study.

In order to retain clarity in research purpose and to gain further insight into the challenge of selecting an appropriate and meaningful sampling method in sampling procedure, sample size was next investigated. For motivated reasons the value of information approach to setting sample sizes, was applied. The purpose and research design of the study was consequently described to three industry experts in the field of marketing and

communications research in South Africa. The following sample sizes were recommended and approved:

- Six exploratory focus groups with senior account teams in Integrated Communications Agencies.
- Ten semi-structured depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers of the interviewed senior account teams.
- Fifteen semi-structured depth interviews involving key members of the senior account teams.

Insight into sample size enabled the researcher to address the challenge of selecting an appropriate sampling method. Given the judgement of the independent industry experts, the qualitative exploratory nature of this study, the planned data source methods to this study and the approved sample sizes for the study, a non-probability sample method was employed. Cooper and Schindler (1998:224) confirm that non-probability sampling is typically applied in exploratory research when the aim is to research population elements that are atypical – in the case of this study, the Integrated Communications Agency.

The non-probability sampling method that is best suited to the nature, purpose and constraints of this study is judgment sampling. As Green et al. (1988:327) and Sudman and Blair (1998:348) explain, expert judgment and an appropriate strategy can produce a sample that is appropriate to the objectives of a study. Aaker et al. (1998: 390) furthermore assert that with a sample of less than ten, judgment sampling will present a more reliable and representative sample than would a probability sampling method. The following sampling strategy was implemented, leveraging the opinions of the independent industry experts, to produce the final focus group sample of Integrated Communications Agencies.

The agencies identified by the industry experts were tabled. The agencies that received more than one mention were isolated and ranked. The six Integrated

Communications Agencies that received the most mentions and collective approval of the industry experts, in rank order, are FCB, TBWA Hunt Lascaris, Net#work BBDO, The Jupiter Drawing Room, Ogilvy & Mather RSTM and King James. In keeping with the Delphi Method to Forecasting, the results of the assessment of expert opinion were presented to the interviewed industry experts to provide an opportunity to compare own previous judgements to those of others and to respond to the proposed sample of Integrated Communications Agencies. The proposed sample met with all of the experts' approval.

Three of the industry experts however reasoned that in their opinion smaller agencies, due to their need to meet clients' needs and generate revenue, tend to produce more integrated brand communications solutions. In response, the final two phases of research involving semi-structured depth interviews with clients and key players in the senior account teams, are structured as follows:

Two clients will be interviewed from each of the top four large to medium sized Integrated Communications Agencies. King James will then also be included as the only small agency, to produce a sample of ten depth interviews with Marketing or Brand Managers. Likewise, a sample size of fifteen key members from the senior account teams (Five Strategic Planners, five Media Planners and five Creative Directors) is produced.

It is envisaged that the theoretical and real world analysis and assessment of research steps and methods in this chapter, delivers a research methodology that is appropriate and meaningful. The practical execution of this qualitative exploratory research study, the analysis of data, the research results and the interpretation thereof, will next be presented in Chapter 5.